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The Roots of Black Academic Achievement:
An Argument for Socially-Constructed Learning

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ABSTRACT

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For centuries commentators have argued about the cause of scholastic

under-achievement in North America. In particular, the high representation of

minority groups in this category has been the source of heated debate. Some

said that it was the fault of the home, others believed that the problem was

genetic in nature. Whatever the explanation, thinkers focused predominately on

the negative elements of minority education. This is where this study is different.

My main concern is to identify black students who have been successful at

school and to pinpoint why they have succeeded. To this end, I combine in-

depth interviews with narrative. The end result is a preliminary, positive

contribution that allows the participants to tell their own stories of success. It

allows them to tell how they have persevered. Furthermore, this study

encourages them to discuss their continual achievement in the face of

stereotypes, nay Sayers and images that suggest otherwise.

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Secondly, a thank you is also in order to the participants in my study. Without you, these words would be mere suppositions. Finally, I want to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my family and friends. You kept me on the right track during the writing process. Your support will never be forgotten. Now on to the Ph.D.!!!

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Chapter One

Setting the Stage: The Background of the Issue

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, some nagging issues from the previous era continue to haunt us in the Western world. One enduring struggle persists in the form of still unequal, strained race relations. As a microcosm of this much larger issue, is the lack of achievement or under-achievement of black students in North America.

Many scholars have proposed theories and explanations for this phenomenon. As early as the 18th and 19th centuries, anthropologists presented their "scientific" conclusions that blacks were an inferior race to whites. These "findings" were often used to justify black enslavement. Jensen followed suit in the 1960s, arguing, amongst other things, that the smaller brain size of blacks demonstrated that we have an innately limited capacity for learning. Research on the impact of racial difference on education continued through the decades, though often from a different perspective.

One of the most prolific writers in the field of minority education comes to the fore in the 1970s with his controversial sociocultural/sociological argument. John Ogbu asserts that the key to understanding minority status and learning lies in the examination of sociological variables and phenomena (1978). In the simplest sense, he argues that minorities who choose to immigrate to (rather than those who were already here or/are forced to relocate to) their new societies tend to be more successful academically and professionally. The voluntary nature of their relocation results in their positive outlook towards the

obstacles they may encounter. They are not swayed from their objectives by the discrimination they face. Their aim is to become an integral part of their new society. Therefore, they explore all avenues that will guarantee their success. Education is one such avenue. The same mentality is transmitted from parent to child, particularly in relation to academic achievement. Children are encouraged to embrace the school culture as much as possible. The outcome of personal, familial and socioeconomic improvement is worth all the hardship which they may encounter. According to Ogbu, East Indians and East Asians (amongst others) fall into the "voluntary immigrant" group (Ogbu 1983, 1991).

Conversely, involuntary minorities (those raised in the host society for generations and who have been subjected to constant discrimination there), interpret the school culture as a threat to, and betrayal of, their own culture. They do not see themselves reflected in it. All that the school culture embraces is rejected by involuntary minority groups. However, the voluntary immigrant considers school and its values as adjuncts to their own culture but not replacements of it. Typically, blacks, Hispanics and First Nations people (amongst others) fall into the "involuntary minority" category (Ogbu 1983, 1991).

Two principal objections are leveled against Ogbu's work. First, Ogbu is accused of over-generalization in his analysis. That is, not all voluntary minorities are successful and not all involuntary minorities are academic failures. Moreover, there are several distinctions and divisions within individual minority groups. Therefore, it is misleading to minimize or overlook these internal distinctions by placing all minorities in the same category. In addition, the

argument can be made that Ogbu does not address the personal side of the equation. He does not adequately examine the self-alienation which some successful minorities must endure in order to excel.

In Ogbu's defense, he acknowledges both limitations (Ogbu 1991). Nonetheless, it is not his intention to analyze the personal side of minority success or failure. His focus in on the broader picture. Ogbu is interested in investigating what *macro level* factors contribute to minority success or failure. Therefore, to a certain extent, over-generalization is inevitable. Nonetheless, I believe that there is still unquestionable value to Ogbu's work. His contribution gives us a broad perspective and understanding of why some minorities succeed and why others do not.

Around the same time that John Ogbu was advancing his arguments, another voice arose in the debate. The Head Start programs of the 1970s in the United States of America and some of the research in the 1980s brought us a more interpersonal/ communicative explanation for minority under-achievement. The Head Start programs began with the premise that black, Hispanic and other low-income ethnic minorities suffered from more than economic deprivation. These groups were also culturally deprived. They lacked the values and examples of academic success which were evident in middle-class, white North America. Therefore, children from these types of families needed an added boost to ensure they too, would perform favourably at school. The Head Start programs were to provide this boost.

Henry Giroux (1983) and later Frederick Erickson (1987) build on this framework of cultural deprivation. They both present a more refined assessment of the situation. However, I assert that the ideological roots of their arguments are essentially the same.

According to Giroux (1983), there is a mismatch between the school's culture and language and that of minority students. The latter arrive at school with the language of their own socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Ironically, it is here that Giroux's line of argument meshes with two proponents from the sociocultural/sociological side of the discourse. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) (updated) argument of cultural reproduction has a similar sociological slant as Ogbu's assessments. These two researchers view the classroom as the representation and reproduction of wider society. Their argument follows that the inequalities and systems of domination which exist in society are perpetuated and reinforced in the school. This is a more sociological approach to the problem whilst Giroux offers a more microcosmic analysis to the discourse.

In my own assessment, the two sides of Giroux and Bourdieu and Passeron offer this amalgamated explanation. When the "cultural capital" (the values, language, culture etc. which are brought to the classroom) of the student is the same as the teacher's, learning and academic success are almost guaranteed for those students. When the pupil's cultural capital differs from the teacher's, success is much harder to attain. First of all, the teacher does not identify with the language and values of the latter student which makes

communication more taxing. Consequently, the teacher develops a negative perception of the student whose background and culture differ from their own. This child sees this negativity and internalizes it. Eventually the child creates his own self-fulfilling prophecy of academic failure. Simply speaking, he believes he cannot succeed so he does not. His under achievement perpetuates the stereotypes or models which the teacher and the wider society has of students from his/her cultural, language, religious or ethnic background.

It is my assertion that Erickson (1987) draws on aspects of both analyses. He argues that cultural differences influence the way teachers and students from different backgrounds interpret appropriate classroom behavior. This line of argument consciously or unconsciously must assume, following the Bourdieu-Passeron epistemology, that there is a pre-established hierarchy of culture and language that the social order epitomizes. There must be an assumption that the language and culture of the teacher, presumably from the white middle-class is placed at the top whilst the differing values of minorities languish at the bottom of the hierarchy. Therefore, to inject Giroux's perspective, when the minority child enters the North American/European classroom (s)he is already at a disadvantage because (s)he does not operate with the same set of verbal and non-verbal cues as the teacher or the middle-class white student. For example, a student whose culture stresses avoidance of eye contact with one's elders as an act of respect will come into conflict with the white North American teacher who believes that not making eye contact is disrespectful. This misinterpretation of non-verbal communication styles results in the teacher's inaccurate evaluation

of that child as a poor student. As in the case described by Ogbu, the impression the teacher has impacts the way the student sees himself. The teacher's low expectations of that student translate into the student's eventual failure. Of course, this is a very simplistic explanation of what actually occurs. I suspect that in reality, the process is much more subtle even though the above may be the net outcome.

The major shortcoming of both these arguments is that they place the onus of minority student failure on the child, the child's family, language, culture and ethnicity. That is, the students from a low socioeconomic background come to school with a cultural and language deficit because of their parents' lack of education or some other fault of their own. This is a dangerous framework in which to work. This is what we are trying to move away from. These lines of argument lie dangerously close to Jensen's racist theories of inherent genetic flaws or advantages that predetermine academic success or failure.

I have highlighted dominant parts of Ogbu, Bourdieu and Passeron, Giroux and Erickson's perspectives on why minorities succeed or fail. I believe there is validity in aspects of all of the arguments. Ogbu, Bourdieu and Passeron give us a broader picture of how society impacts on the classroom while Giroux and Erickson describe the interpersonal relations which focus on how teachers' perceptions and culture negatively or positively affect student learning. As Schneider and Lee (1990) point out, the underlying reason for minorities' poorer academic performance probably lies in the combination of both the sociological and the interpersonal interactions.

Nonetheless, there are other factors that I feel need to be considered. Based on the literature and my own impressions I believe that greater attention has to be paid to at least three other variables. Firstly, we have to investigate the role of self-identity in the education process. The more the student aligns him/herself with what occurs in the classroom, the more personal satisfaction (s)he gets from schooling, the more (s)he is likely to do well in school (Steele 1992). G. H. Mead's research on the development of self-identity may also be pertinent in this part of the discussion (1934). Secondly, it is imperative to examine the role that a high-achieving friendship group of like ethnic (or other) composition has on a student's scholarly performance. Cordeiro and Carspecken's (1993) analyses will be instructive here. How do academically successful minorities learn to navigate the system? How do they learn which behaviors are deemed "appropriate" by the teacher and how do they adopt them? What personal price do they pay for adopting these "appropriate behaviors"? Thirdly, and equally important, is the investigation of the effect which adult models of occupational and educational success have on minority children's self-perception and their perception of their academic and professional possibilities.

These queries offer new avenues for future research in the field of minority education. What quickly becomes apparent is that there is no single explanation for the phenomenon of minority underachievement and greater variations abound with regards to why those who succeed do so. It becomes more explicit that there are few arguments that can be broadly generalized. To

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more fully understand minority status and learning requires an enormous investment of time and a commitment to investigate the similarities and differences of several ethnic, religious and cultural groups.

The Little Boy/Girl Who Could: Where Academic Success Begins

For the sake of a balanced perspective, the focus of my research is not on why black youth fail in school. I want to shed new, positive light on black attainment. There is enough academic discussion of our failure, it is high time we address our successes. Therefore, in my study, I directed my attention to stories of success. I identified older black youth (in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties) who, through narratives gathered in a series of in-depth open-ended interviews, told how they bucked the expectations of academic failure. These interviews helped me to gain a clear sense of what they perceived as the driving force behind their achievement. My questions centred around one pivotal point or person in their lives that spurred them on to greater scholastic heights. Or identifying if there were a series of events (or people) which guided their academic development. Also, I was interested in uncovering how these events were linked. In essence, I wanted to pinpoint the "conduit", to use Cordeiro and Carspecken's term. A conduit is the circumstances and events that condition choices for educational success rather than for other possible routes (Cordeiro & Carspecken 1993, 281).

Although I started my research with Ogbu's socio-cultural theories as my ideological guide, I ended it with a strong leaning towards neo-Vygotskian theory,

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the work of Henry Trueba and that of Jerome Bruner. Thanks to the data provided by my informal conversations, my findings and conclusions now focus on another aspect of minority education and intellectual development.

I still greatly admire the work of John Ogbu. However, my interviews have led me to agree with his detractors who argue that his (in)voluntary minority theory is not the best mode of analysis for individual cases. In particular, this aspect of Ogbu's argument was not helpful in my Montreal case studies of success. My participants' responses and life stories or experiences link their success to personal motivation spurred on by parents or teachers or some other significant individual in their life. Although they were keenly aware of a biased image of their "blackness" in society, their emphasis was on the positive elements in their life. These are some of the factors that Ogbu's theory cannot address.

In retrospect, I tried to apply Ogbu's theory to a situation and to a research question with which it was not designed to tackle. Instead, I found that Vygotskian ideas on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and on assisted learning far more instructive and appropriate to my research question and subsequent findings. Indeed, in due course, I hope to interview young non-minority Montreal academics as well as a sample where participants come from various socio-economic backgrounds. It would be instructive to see what they pinpoint as reasons for their success. I believe that they would respond similarly to my minority participants. However, as it is not possible to speak with white academics for this study, it is certainly an area to extend my research at the

doctoral level. If the findings support my expectations they will strengthen the argument I am attempting to develop with my present study. That is, that the independent variable which explains academic success in nearly all cases is the bridged gap between a person's "actual development", exhibited by independent problem-solving, and his/her "potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers "(Vygotsky 1978: 86). However, as an aside here, these findings would also indicate another factor at work. The same type of responses from minority and non-minority students will still not explain the under-representation of blacks in Montreal academic circles. In this respect, a larger issue is at play. I suspect that the issue has more to do with biased practices, and entrenched beliefs at higher political and administrative levels. I believe that the disparity speaks of a systemic exclusion of black students; hence the need for macro theories.

This is where Ogbu and more macro-level explanations of minority success/failure become more applicable. This is what I believe needs to happen. Once we as educators, researchers, parents and peers grasp the process of a person's intellectual development as outlined by Vygotsky, we begin to understand the weight upon our own shoulders. The debate shifts from an examination (solely) of what the teachers do or do not accomplish in the classroom, or from the disinterest/involvement of minority parents to a more all-encompassing view. In this larger scope, we have to pay attention to our own contribution to minority success or failure. At the macro level we have to account for our images of where minorities fit in our societal organization. How

have public policy, media etc. helped or hindered the academic and professional success of our minority members? At the micro/community level, questions arise about our interpersonal relations with members of minority groups. Do we offer words and actions of encouragement or do our responses perpetuate negative stereotypes about their innate scholastic abilities? The work of Vygotsky, Trueba, Bruner, Ogbu and other thinkers force us to see our inter-connectedness and interdependence as a society. Therefore, the failure or success of our minority members is a collective accomplishment or indictment. The state of our minority members is a statement on the (in)justice of our society. It is also an indication of what our society will become in the future.

Vygotsky articulates what is often neglected in the conventional branches of psychology and in other social sciences also. He demonstrates that learning is a cultural construct. How, why and what we learn is not only a psychological, cerebral process, it is also a process which is shaped by those around us. Intelligence, and by extension academic success or lack thereof, is not located in a single head. A renowned research professor of psychology put it this way.

It (intelligence) exists as well not only in your particular environment of books, dictionaries and notes, but also in the heads and habits of the friends with whom you interact...It is that subtle "sharing" that constitutes distributed intelligence. By entering such a community, you have entered not only upon a set of conventions of praxis but upon a way of exercising intelligence (Bruner, 1996:154).

One begins to understand the enormity and the power of this theory when one applies it to minority education. Bruner (1996) synthesizes Vygotsky'a and Trueba's debates beautifully. His emphasis on culture's role in the learning process was a breath of fresh air for me in my review of psychological literature. In essence, Bruner articulates the very findings that I uncovered through my interviews and in my own reflections. Bruner provides valuable insight on the bigger picture.

Bruner raises several questions in his discussion of education and culture. Two of the main ones are, "what is the value and purpose of schooling in the learning process?" and secondly, " what are we trying to achieve through the education/ schooling system?" He juxtaposes the "talent-centered/ driven learning" approach with the "tool-centered/ driven learning" approach. The first perspective places the responsibility for learning on the individual's shoulders. In this sense it advocates that how much you learn is dependent on your own natural mental abilities. Thus, the goal of schooling is merely to increase those intrinsic, pre-existing cognitive skills of the student. Conversely, the tool-oriented perspective emphasizes the role of the educator and surrounding culture in the learning process. How well a student learns is not entirely dependent on his/her own abilities. Instead, how well an individual learns is largely due to how well the educator and the culture equip them with the tools necessary to succeed in the larger society. That is, the onus is on the educator to create an environment that best facilitates learning. The talent-centered approach decreases the role of the educator. It implies that a student with strong innate learning abilities will (for the

most part) do well at school regardless of the learning environment in which (s)he finds him/herself.

Bruner claims that both positions are "meritorious". However, from his discussion of school as a culture and culture as a tool kit in of itself, we see that he favours the "tool-centered" approach. The author argues that learning does not occur in a vacuum. How an individual learns and what he/she learns is strongly influenced by his everyday experiences and realities. This point is particularly pertinent for minority children in North American schools. The school curriculum they encounter often bears no resemblance to their own lives, their own ways of understanding and their own cultural and religious beliefs. As Canadians, we are still struggling with this issue. We are still debating and negotiating how the multiculturalism that exists in our nation's statutes can best become a healthy reality in our nation's schools.

Bruner (1996) also explores the relationship between language and the individual's theory of mind. The examination of how a person thinks must by necessity include the examination of how he/she speaks and the socio-cultural contexts in which he/she lives. For example, in Japanese and some other Asian cultures, the words used to address others indicate each person's social ranking and even birth order in a family. The elderly are accorded highest honor and respect. Therefore, they are addressed with the appropriate terms to express such honor. As a result, it is essential for the children to learn to think and speak in this way. The mind-culture discourse solidifies the fact that the individual is more than a mental and physical being. The individual is essentially and

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foremost a cultural entity. Culture *shapes* one's language and one's interpretations and theories of mind. *Not* the other way around. In fact, culture shapes thought. It also determines what one thinks is important to know. Culture should not be viewed on a macro-level alone (eg. on a country or even community level). Culture pervades every institution and organizational structure of a society. At the micro-level, culture encompasses the home as well. This is the first venue where the essential values of a culture are passed onto the younger generations. The second venue is the school.

This analysis corresponds with Trueba's (1999) statements on the empowerment of Mexican immigrant children. Trueba believes that critical ethnography is the key to understanding oppression at the individual level and overcoming it at the societal level. In so doing, Trueba crystallizes ideas from Freire and Vygotsky. In a Vygotskian theoretical framework, Trueba categorizes literacy at the micro level as "the essential link between the social and cognitive worlds that permit children to grow intellectually, to learn and develop their talents and capacity" (1999: 611). At the macro level, Trueba asserts that the process of acquiring literacy cannot occur unless individuals,

enjoy full human rights and supportive relationships with "more informed peers" and with teachers. Children need to know the world in order to learn the word. Higher mental functions cannot develop unless children enjoy positive social relationships and are not the victims of poverty, isolation, abuse, racism, neglect, or poor health...Freedom from racism and oppression does not guarantee learning and development in children, but it is a necessary condition

for both...Pedagogy does not end in the school, it must continue in the homes, in society and in all domains of life.(1999: 611).

Cordeiro and Carspecken's (1993) study of 20 Hispanic achievers is also instructive here. Their findings pinpoint the difficulties that minority students have to face in their struggle for academic accomplishment. The macro and micro-level challenges converge in these two researchers' presentation of the Hispanic students' stories. The 20 Mexican-American students were clearly aware of the contrast between their Hispanic home culture and the broader U.S "mainstream" culture in which they were schooled. The authors state that from the early days of schooling, a tension was set up between the home and the school.

A choice to succeed was a choice to accept sole responsibility for educational attainment, without full understanding or support from home...All respondents reported significant experiences which usually took place during elementary school and which profoundly influenced their construction of a proschool interpretative scheme (1993: 281).

Interestingly enough, although the conduit was the same for the participants I interviewed (ie. significant figures who encouraged scholastic achievement were apparent in their lives too), they did not express similar feelings of discontinuity between their home and school cultures. On the contrary, the support for academic achievement was strong from the home front.

The role model and/or caregiver who influenced good school performance was mainly my participants' parents. Perhaps, in a larger sample of individuals I might uncover a similar sentiment to the one Cordeiro and Carspecken found. In addition, the fact that the students' first language was also the language of instruction, may have diffused the tension between home and school as experienced by these 20 Hispanic students.

This finding was also of interest to me because it conflicted with my original hypothesis. Although I expected that most of the participants would identify a pivotal moment or individual in their lives which caused them to (re)apply themselves to their studies, I also anticipated that the participants had to make several cultural "trade-offs" in order to succeed at school. I assumed that they would have to navigate the different waters of the school and home environment. I hypothesized that most of my sample had to adopt a new culture: the culture of the white North American classroom. For some, maybe this would mean alienation from their home culture. For others it would mean learning where and how to blend the two milieux and effectively became bicultural. However, this proved to not be the case with the persons I interviewed.

Other aspects of the Cordeiro and Carspecken analysis are pertinent to my topic and merit further exploration. Although my findings do not support all of their assertions (sometimes they are not applicable to my study because similar questions did not arise in my talks), I believe it is a very valuable model and is still informative to this study. Their work is one of the few systematic attempts to

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understand why and how a minority element within a minority group could succeed. As such, the importance of their study cannot be over-emphasized.

Cordeiro and Carspecken present thirteen parts of the details of their model which explain minority achievement. These are particularly useful. They are: (1) the origins: the initial cultural milieu, (2) the conduit which I have already discussed, (3) the success-facilitation interpretative scheme, (4) distancing identity from dominant cultural labels, (5) distancing personal identity from the home culture, (6) adoption of dominant views of success, (7) the achieving friendship group and segregation, (8) strategic action oriented towards success, (9) handling economic constraints, (10) time management, (11) cheating, (12) dealing with teachers and (13) playing the high achiever's game. In my research methodology and findings chapter, I will articulate how my study reflected, or failed to reflect, these thirteen characteristics.

Some may still wonder at the relevance of my line of research. Others may argue that it is not scientific and cannot therefore be applied to a larger sample of people, far less a society. However, I do not pretend that this study will answer any of the larger issues of race relations and minority status and learning. Indeed, no single study can honestly make such a claim. My limited time and financial resources have forced me to look at a small but important part of the equation, that is, the exception to the rule.

While these results may not be generalizable in the statistical sense of the term, my belief is that much can be learned from the stories presented here. I believe that they can become a knowledge base that one can draw on in future

research and in educational practice. In this way, the knowledge may have some impact on education practitioners in the classroom and in their research vis-à-vis minority status and learning. At the very least, I am hopeful that the data and conclusions which this study will present will encourage us to be more reflective about how, what and who we teach.

On the broader scale, I hope this study can contribute to the increasing discourse on cultural capital. It is imperative that educators at all levels become more aware of the special qualities, life experiences and world views that their students bring to the classroom. This is particularly essential in a multicultural Canada. Once we begin to grapple with the vastness of this thing called culture, the more we come to appreciate that all students are *not* the same. Therefore, all students *cannot* and *should* not be taught in the same manner. As a society, we have become so engrossed in the age of political correctness that we are scared to acknowledge differences that make a difference even while our similarities bind us. The metropolitan Montreal classroom makes this abundantly clear.

Finally, this research project is intensely personal. For the past seven years I have been living in the greater Montreal region. My upbringing was in Barbados, a tiny English-speaking Caribbean nation of 166 square miles and a population of about 275 000 people. Nonetheless, we boast of a literacy rate of 98% and higher and free education even at the tertiary level. Needless to say we are a very proud people who revere higher education and academic success. So imagine the shock when I arrived at McGill University for orientation at 18

years of age to find only a handful of other blacks in this huge auditorium. My despair deepened throughout my three years there, as the number of black Montreal classmates only marginally increased. I kept pondering why this was so. This question still bothers me seven years later. This is one of the major reasons why I thought to undertake this study. Not only do I hope that it will contribute to the scholarly discourse on the issue of minority status in Canada, but I also hope that some nagging personal questions will be clarified if not answered.

Chapter Two

Uncovering the Issues: My Research Methodology: Procedure, Problems and Findings

The most effective approaches for this kind of study are narratives and in-depth open-ended interviews. I chose to have informal conversations and open-ended interviews. This does not mean that I did not have an idea of what I wanted to discover. On the contrary, I had a list of general questions I wanted to address (appendix 1) but I allowed the participants to answer the questions as exhaustively or as curtly as they wished.

My sample was a small one of only six individuals. Initially, my goal was to select persons based on their availability, on their willingness to talk to me and on fitting my criteria (between 25-35 years of age, black, predominately Montreal upbringing at least from the age of 9 or 10, university educated etc.). As I mentioned, my informal conversations with various people on the subject of minority relations, and my own experiences and reflections formed the basis for my formal interviews. The former helped me to determine what questions to pose and what avenues to explore. My informal discussions also helped me to generate the list of questions for each interview. In spite of these early steps, I was not successful in finding my "perfect" sample.

Two practical concerns forced me to change the structure of my sample. One was the lack of time. I was unable to find 10-12 individuals who fit my criteria in the space of time I gave myself to generate a sample. I was not fully aware of how exhausting it is to put together an acceptable sample. Therefore, I

did not budget my time well enough to generate a satisfactory sample that would address the questions of race, gender and socio-economic status. Furthermore, new angles and perspectives presented themselves as my writing and background research progressed. These developments also highlighted the need for better time management in the future. These are lessons for next time. The next incident was an impromptu trip to Barbados.

A number of issues remain unresolved. Firstly (as I mentioned in the preceding paragraph), I was unable to grapple with the disparities that I believe gender and socio-economic cause. I expect that women perform better than men at school. Additionally, it will come as no surprise if those students from a more middle-or upper-class background are more successful. However, because I was unable to isolate a sample of successful young, black Montreal men and another sample based on different socio-economic levels, I cannot make any definitive statements on this, only suppositions. Nonetheless, my observations on a recent trip to Barbados are pertinent here. I realized that although Barbados is largely a racially homogenous society that boasts a 98% literacy rate and free education up to the tertiary level, many black students still struggle at school. The disparity is still there, as it is in North America, between those who succeed and those who do not. However, in the Barbadian reality the common denominator is not colour. To complicate matters, more often than not, more females than males succeed. Larger issues of social class and of the structure of the local curriculum loom in the background. As in the North American context, the personal attributes, talents and types of knowledge

favoured in the Barbadian classroom do not reflect the characteristics of a large number of its black population. So what is the main problem?

Indeed, the situation has become so bothersome that there are calls for a complete overhaul of the Barbadian education system. There is on-going debate on the fairness of co-educational schools. All of the public primary and secondary schools have both male and female students. Some opponents argue that boys are at a distinct disadvantage in these settings. Furthermore, they argue, the results of this injustice are evident in boys' poorer scores in national standardized tests. On a larger scale, widespread lawlessness and unemployment among older male youth attest to the need for immediate educational reform.

Let me digress for a moment to provide a brief background for those of my readers who are unfamiliar with the system. The Barbadian form of education is exacting, to say the least. Pupils sit the Common Entrance exam, their first crucial standardized test at 11 years of age. The screening test, as it is sometimes called, focuses on mathematics, English and composition. Your scores on the test determine which secondary school you will attend. Students who perform well go on to the "older" secondary schools. These are renowned establishments, similar to the grammar schools in the United Kingdom, which produce most of the nation's leaders and professionals. Predominately, but not exclusively, emphasis is placed on the hard sciences and on languages. Even in these schools, students are streamlined at an early age into one of these two areas. Students who perform less well move on to the "newer" secondary

schools. In some ways, these schools stress less of an academic curriculum. Although sciences and languages are taught, there are also alternative streams. Woodwork, home economics, technical drawing, basic business skills form part of the syllabus. In my estimation, before their first day at secondary school, at 11 years of age, the students are aware that they have failed. Less is expected of them academically. Indeed, many of them must also feel that they are capable of less.

Furthermore, one must bear in mind that Barbadian students wear uniforms until tertiary level. Therefore, it is easy to identify who attends an older or newer secondary school. It is easy for me to see how students who attend "newer" secondary schools can develop an inferiority complex. They have "passed for" a school which is not known for its academics and they are "branded" by their uniforms.

The Barbadian school system exhibits signs of a hidden or invisible curriculum. Spindler (1982) provides a succinct definition of the invisible curriculum. "The phrase "hidden curriculum", points to the fact that, in school contexts specifically, side-by-side with the manifest curriculum, a set of such tacit assumptions is being enacted and thereby being taught an learned." (243). The invisible curriculum embodies the purpose of schooling in each society. That is, the school environment prepares the individual to fill a role in the wider society. Where the adult will be positioned in the wider society is determined by their membership in particular groups as children. These (largely) unconscious assumptions of where each individual should fit determine the interaction

between teacher, administrator and student in the daily workings of the school. Unfortunately, but predictably, those students from lower socioeconomic strata and those from groups that are culturally different from that of the dominant culture are the victims of these stereotypes (Wilcox 1982, Bowles & Gintis 1976, Meyer 1970, Sennett & Cobb 1972, Brookover & Erickson 1975). The most prevalent instruments of stratification are gender, social class and ethnicity. I hypothesize that in the Barbadian picture, the factors that are used to create divisions are gender and social class. In the Montreal and Canadian environments, the delineating factors are social class, gender, ethnicity and language.

The observations from the Barbadian society are relevant to our own Western setting. It appears that schooling is a social institution in a (largely) universal sense. That is, in practically all societies, the classroom *transmits* rather than *transforms* the dominant culture. As such, it does not maximize social equality by promoting equal opportunity as we would like to believe. Instead, schools maximize social differentiation by deciding what positions individuals will fill later in the stratified and differentiated workforce (Brookover & Erickson 1975: 105). In both the Barbadian and North American school environments, this stream-lining process often occurs unintentionally on the part of the educators, school administrators and departments of education. I suspect that they are convinced they have their students' best interests at heart. Furthermore, they would probably be appalled at any suggestion that they have

disadvantaged or stereotyped any of their students. Yet, this is what happens daily. Wilcox shows us how this can occur.

Kathleen Wilcox conducted a study in two elementary schools in the West Coast of the United States. One group of children was from a working-class background. The second group comprised children from professional, upper-middle class families. Both groups were predominately white, around the age of six and were reflective of the American mainstream society. In essence, Wilcox generated a sample where social class was the independent variable (1982:269-309).

Wilcox (1982) tried to address several key questions with her research. Principally, she wanted to uncover whether children were given equal opportunity to learn skills and attitudes that prepared them for a variety of work roles, or if instead, particular skills were taught to particular groups of children. Wilcox wanted to investigate if social class was the basis for this distinction. Her findings supported this unfortunate suspicion.

What was most disturbing about Wilcox's findings was the response of the teachers, administrators and government officials in both schools. Wilcox shatters the myth that schools are able to uncover students' individual differences and abilities in an objective, neutral and equitable manner. The instruments of "divination" are elaborate series of standardized testing, grading and ranking. Wilcox contends that the individual who is most intimately involved in the rituals of testing, grading and ranking, the teacher, is a cultural being. He/she comes to the classroom with his/her own biases. The teacher labels

his/her students based on assumptions that are a reflection of their own cultural reality and epistemology (1982: 272). How then, can we realistically expect the teacher to be impartial?

As I noted before, Wilcox makes it clear that the categorization process is largely unintentional. In her study, the researcher and her assistant recorded the interactions between the students and the teachers in both groups. In addition, they discussed both schools' situations with representatives from the departments of education in both districts. What they found was shocking but not surprising. Teachers and administrators from the upper-middle class school described the parents as "fascinating... college-educated people who have such high expectations of their children and of their school" (1982: 297). On the other hand, the schoolteacher from the lower-income group described her students as "everyday Joe Smiths" without any outstanding distinctive talent or ability (1982: 297). Moreover, comments from the staff of the working-class school are scathing indictments of the parents and home environment.

I don't really feel that the parents, some of them, really realize what kind of a home life they are giving their kids, because they've got so many problems themselves that they can't solve. You get into a filtering-down thing, too, from the parent to the child (1982: 296).

This was another telling comment.

I know kids that go home at three o' clock that are street kids until six. Or

they go home to a babysitter, and the babysitter goes, "Sure, you know(do

whatever you want)."...There's families there that constantly give their kids

money, "Go buy a popsicle or something. "...I think there's a lot of parents, I

know there are parents because I've called on 'em and said, "Hey, we've got a

problem with your kid." "Well, I can't come tonight, that's bowling," and the kid is

the last thing on their minds. Kids just sort of happen (1982: 296-297).

These types of remarks are often heard when teachers deal with ethnic

minority students as well. Trueba, Jacobs and Kirton explain why this is so. The

authors contend that the lack of cultural understanding often contributes to a

deep sense of frustration and resentment in teachers and administrators working

with minority students. "There is a cultural conflict and an emotional climate

leading to misinterpretation of behavior, racial prejudice and almost despair.

This climate does not permit systematic and rational instructional planning, much

less the implementation of effective instructional activities" (1990: xx).

I must also briefly discuss a classic in the field of the ethnography of

schooling. George and Louise Spindler's 1982 study crystallized the debate

beautifully. Their analyses pinpoint the insidious nature of discrimination and

cultural misunderstandings. In fact, their work in anthroethnography as it relates

to education is ground-breaking. It sets the stage for future studies by Wilcox ,

Trueba and other social science researchers. The first fascinating thing about

the study is that it is a combination of two studies. The first study was conducted

in 1951 in the American West Coast. The second study took place in two phases in 1967-1968 and again in1977 in a small German town. In spite of the obvious geographical and cultural differences between these two communities, what was particularly striking was that in both settings the transmission of the dominant culture in the classroom and in the local administration of schooling was evident. In both cases, the teachers conveyed the supremacy of their own cultural orientation to their students. They also attributed higher levels of intelligence, particularly in the West Coast study, to those students who embodied their own values (1982: 36). In both cases, the transmission of values was unconscious.

In the rural German community, Spindler and Spindler found that the teachers continued to emphasize and romanticize a more traditional, agricultural way of life after 10 or more years of reform. This was significant because the educational policies promulgated by external authorities stressed more urban orientations and ideals that were to be inculcated into the curriculum (1982: 31-36).

In the West Coast account, the researchers observed one male elementary school teacher for six months. Their subject, Roger Harker, was considered by his colleagues and himself to be a fair, popular educator who was well-versed in his subject and who had a keen commitment to educating his pupils. What Spindler & Spindler uncovered was a teacher who was discriminating against some of his students in subtle ways. His interaction with the students who were from a similar white, middle-class background as himself

was more favourable, he knew more about their home situations and interacted with them more than with his other students. The students who were less favoured saw this. Roger Harker and the school administration and staff did not (1982:25-31). Without Spindler and Spindler's input, Roger Harker would probably have remained oblivious to his own discriminatory but well-intentioned actions in his grade five classroom.

The two accounts in Spindler and Spindler's study, as well as the studies by Wilcox (1970), Bowles and Gintis (1976) and others highlight the need for educators to be reflective about their craft. They must admit to their own cultural biases and interpretations. They must then address how these interpretations impact their students and consequently, take the necessary steps to change these misconceptions. As Spindler and Spindler put it, they must learn to make their familiar cultural environment strange and then make it familiar again. From the perspective of a member of the dominant culture, the problem with their own biased opinions of minorities is that they are supported by the larger society. So much so, in fact, that they no longer see them as stereotypes but as accurate reflections of particular groups of people. Indeed, Spindler and Spindler argue, we do not see our own biases at all; or at least not without external intervention (1982: 24-26). The external intervention is what allows the individual to make the familiar strange and then familiar again.

Another issue must be addressed. What is "culture" and what is "intelligence"? Unfortunately, many educators and the community at large have embraced a very narrow, rigid definition of both these terms. Intelligence is often

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seen as a person's ability to perform well on a standardized test (Jensen 1981, Dunn 1987). There is no consideration in this definition of cultural background and cultural understandings. There is no room to discuss if the understandings, assumptions and interpretations of both the compiler of the test and of the individual taking the test are the same. As a response to these narrow meanings, Trueba et al. have created a wonderful alternative denotation of intelligence. "Intelligence is the ability to pursue individual and group cultural goals through activities perceived as enhancing the home culture values"(1990:10). They add that, "intelligence is definitely not measurable by the ability to score high in tests constructed by individuals from another culture in narrowly constructed literacy and problem-solving settings" (1990: 10).

Trueba et al. (1990:11-14) also provide us with the salient terminologies of culture from the 19th through to the 21st centuries. Initially, in the 19th century, culture was limited to knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, habits and capabilities acquired by members of a given society. In the early 20th century the meaning of culture took on a decidedly more social focus. Culture came to be seen not as genetically determined but rather as a social inheritance. Culture was learned through language and through social behaviour. In the late 20th century, this definition was expanded yet again. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of ethnography. Ethnography encouraged the exploration of human adaptation to their environment. In particular, ethnography focused on the way in which humans reorganized their behaviour to gain the rewards that their culture and its values emphasized. But whatever the meaning of culture we

stress, Trueba et al. make one thing clear. The use of ethnography is an essential part of the equation and it must be conducted with care. "Suffice it say that the study of cultural transmission (that is, of knowledge and cultural values), particularly through school activities, requires systematic observations, careful interviewing, and the use of well-crafted instruments. It also requires both cross-cultural and historical analytical frames of reference" (1990: 13).

When we understand the role of schooling, the hidden curriculum and the part that educators (often) unwittingly play in this process, we begin to see why blacks and other ethnic minorities in North America face such an uphill task to succeed academically. Moreover, we begin to appreciate and laud the successes of those who refuse to reproduce the image of failure, poverty, crime and non-achievement.

The Participants

Now back to my present study. Montreal is a unique, challenging and exhilarating environment in which to conduct research in this area. This study and my interests cross the fields of minority education, political science and public administration and public policy, cultural psychology and anthropology. Although the study and the sample size are small, I believe that the results speak to the experiences of other students in an educational setting in which they are the minority. I make this bold statement based on the literature I have reviewed. Many of the comments my participants made crossed the barriers of socio-economics and even of ethnicity, in some cases. This is particularly telling when we examine the definitions and findings of Cordeiro and Carspecken's 1993 model.

In the Montreal reality there are so many variables to consider and isolate. For example, the language challenges for English-speaking blacks in a French-speaking province readily combine with heated political debates of Quebec sovereignty and its separation from Canada since the 1970s. It is my assertion that this has created a society for many blacks (and other minority and non-minority groups) where people live in a state of transience. Perhaps, though, young Anglophone blacks have felt this uncertainty and alienation more than others. Young blacks have few hopes of making a living in Montreal. Instead, Montreal is a place to "get yourself together", as one black female phrased it. "You stay to get your education (Quebec is probably the least expensive place in

Canada to attend university), get by because rent is cheap, and once you get your degree you move elsewhere to start your life."

In another instance, Sandra, one of the participants in the study, expressed her feeling of being unwelcome in Montreal society. This sentiment was strong in spite of having lived in Montreal for over twenty years. In Sandra's assessment, Jacques Parizeau's 1995 post-referendum statement punctuated this conviction. His declaration that money and the ethnic vote cost the Parti Québécois a "yes" vote for Québec separation clearly highlighted that she, and any non-white, non-francophone, was unwanted here. Sandra, and I believe many others like her, refuse to stay in Québec after she has completed her studies. Her exact words were, "the world will see me but not Québec."

If Ogbu's theory is an inadequate tool of analysis, what then will make some sense of Montreal blacks' academic success? I found that the emphasis on the "home" culture was particularly important for the persons I spoke with. In total, I spoke with six individuals: four women and two men. The structured interviews were about an hour long. The data from my informal conversations were gathered over several months, and in some cases, over several years.

Three of the women in the sample fit my original criteria. They were all black, ranging in age from 27 to 30, raised in Montreal from eight years of age or younger and were all professionals in their own right. The 27-year old is a lawyer, the 28-year old, who I will call Ilene, is a law student at a prestigious U.S. university and the 30 year old, who I will refer to as Sandra, is the assistant director of a program at a Quebec university as well as a civil engineering

student. The other three individuals did not fit this criteria but their information is incredibly useful, particularly for the purpose of cross-cultural analysis. The fourth female in the study is myself.

The two male participants in the study are in their mid-to-late 50s, they were born, raised and still live in Barbados. They defied the odds. They were raised in large, poor families but persevered, nonetheless. The first gentleman is now a noted doctor of economics. The second male participant, is an industrious medical technologist. Their life stories underlined the fact that being poor was not a barrier to academic and professional accomplishment. In fact, *because* they came from very humble beginnings, they were driven to succeed. In the case of the doctor of economics, the pivotal moment was the death of his father. This tragic incident left him and his family in even more dire financial straits. He recalled having little to eat and even less to wear. He swore that this would not be his future and he identified a good education (which was not free in those days in Barbados) as his only hope. He has risen to great heights not just for himself but in the way he has raised his own family. He and his wife, a nurse, have raised four daughters who are now all medical doctors.

Sandra shared a similar experience with me. She too, identified her family-situation as her main motivation for scholastic achievement. She was raised in a single-parent family, one of six children. Sandra's mother had little or no emotional or financial support from her father. Sandra recalled her mother's struggle to provide the basic necessities of "pampers, bread and milk". Indeed, Sandra remembered many times when she was sent to the corner shop to "trust"

(that is, get items on credit) these items. For her, the goal is to change the dynamic with which she grew up. In the long run, she wants to provide for her family, particularly her mother. She wants to make her own choices in life. In essence, she wants to be the dictator of her own destiny. She refuses to be "just another statistic". For her, an engineering education allows her to make the choices *she* wants to make and to create the kind of life *she* wants for herself and for her family.

Sandra's mother has been her mentor in another way. Her mother returned to school in her 30s to fulfill a life-long dream. She has always wanted to be a nursing assistant. She completed her diploma and is now working in her chosen profession. Sandra remembers her mother's words of encouragement and her confidence in her eldest daughter. She hears affirmations that praise her ability and increase her self-confidence. One of her sayings that has remained with me is, "you are the only one of you". Sandra is encouraged to be the best that she can be in her own unique way. This reinforcement is constant from the home front if not always from the school environment.

In Ilene's case, both her parents were raised and schooled in one of the English-speaking Caribbean islands. Financial and family constraints ensured that they never finished high school. Nonetheless, they instilled a zest for learning in their children. Discussions, quizzes etc. on politics, current events, schoolwork and anything remotely related were commonplace in their home.

I have spent a lot of time in Ilene's home and I have always been surprised by the amount of knowledge that her parents possess. Her father has

owned and operated several small businesses. In fact, in one particular case, a commerce university professor approached him for teaching advice on small business ownership!! As an aside, it is interesting to note my surprise at the wealth of knowledge that Ilene's father possesses. There is always an assumption on the part of the formally educated about what those without such education do or do not know.

The third female, Kathleen, is a lawyer from more of a middle-class background. Her mother is a homemaker and her father is a retired teacher. Kathleen's mother was not permitted to go beyond basic schooling. However, and maybe because of this, she was insistent that her two children do their best at school. A mother's persistence, combined with a father's choice of profession, created a home environment that facilitated academic accomplishment. Both children now hold university degrees.

A Closer Look at Cordeiro and Carpsecken (1993)

Having said all of this, how do the findings of this study relate to Cordeiro and Carspecken's model? First, let us return to the researchers' analysis. In particular, I will highlight those parts of their findings that resonated in my own study. The first aspect of the model deals with the origins: the initial cultural milieu of the twenty students. They selected students who were from low-income Hispanic families and who did not place particular emphasis on schooling. Furthermore, these families functioned predominately in Spanish (277-280). Cordeiro and Carspecken argue that, for these Hispanic students, the convergence of these factors created a feeling of belonging to a minority group within the American society. As a result of their interviews, the researchers also concluded that, "the early educational experiences of these students impressed a sharp awareness of cultural contrast upon them, a contrast between home culture and the culture of the U.S. mainstream" (280).

This sentiment of alienation was not present for the participants in my study. In addition, the home and ethnic identities were neither perceived as hindrances to scholastic success nor as inferior to the dominant culture. Ilene, Sandra and Kathleen's home environments actively facilitated learning. The black situation was not presented as a condition of victimization or oppression. Instead, the positive aspects of the black identity were stressed and the individual's ability to triumph over adversity was emphasized. In short, the message that the parents presented was that success and academic attainment

are not determined by colour, race, class or ethnicity, but by a person's unfailing desire to achieve, regardless of their circumstances.

I have already discussed the second factor, the conduit. However, I want to say a few more words on this. In particular, I want to focus on Cordeiro and Carspecken's comment that negative experiences were important for the students' inculcation of a "proschool" identity (281). This was an important factor for Sandra, and in retrospect, for myself also. Sandra mentioned two incidents that spurred her on at school. The first was at the college level, the second at the university level. I will mention the first incident. She recounted the story of her switch to the health sciences at college. Her cegep guidance counselor was convinced that it would be better for her to stay in the office technology stream. In fact, she could not understand why Sandra would want to make the leap to health sciences. The guidance counselor felt that this discipline might be too challenging for Sandra. Nonetheless, Sandra persisted, first to complete a college diploma in health sciences and then an undergraduate degree in biology. The office technology program helped her to define what she did *not* want to do. Moreover, enrolling in the health sciences helped her to overcome her high-school fear that she was not capable of success in the science domain. Biology was for "smart people" and initially she felt that she did not fit into this category. Things were not always easy for her in health sciences. She recalled failing two courses. Nonetheless, she now feels that obtaining those poor grades, was a positive experience. She has learned that failure is not necessarily a bad thing. It is simply a wake-up call to do better or to change direction in the future.

In my own life, I too can recall circumstances that have motivated me to achieve while simultaneously threatening to stagnate my progress. Two circumstances immediately come to mind. Interestingly enough, the negative experiences occurred later in my life. I felt the temptation to give up more at the university level than at any of the earlier stages of my schooling. This is probably due to the fact that I was now in a different society. I no longer had the immediate emotional support of the family members and friends who buoyed my self-confidence. For the first time, I was completely alone in my schooling experiences. The first blow came swiftly and unexpectedly in the form of the mid-term results of the first-class I took at university. Disastrous!! This was only the second time I had failed anything in all my years of schooling!! My thoughts quickly turned to changing majors, returning home, dropping out of university and a myriad of other "not-so-positive" possibilities. A tearful call home to my father set me on the right track. Again, the influence of home came to the fore. His words were, "you will be alright, if I send you to China to study, you will be alright. You can do anything you set your mind to. Just hang in there." And hang in there I did, even after blows number two and three.

The second and third blows were delivered by one of my anthropology professors. He gave me a C- on my first paper. He told me I could not write. My sentence structure was poor, long-winded and utterly without direction. I believe his exact words were "useless, unstructured drivel". My work, and I took that to mean myself also, was not university-level material. I took these comments in stride, after several days of sobbing, shock and righteous

indignation. The result (I hope) is a far more condensed, articulate writing style. This same professor refused to write me a letter of reference for graduate school. He did not feel that my CGPA was high enough. Thanks to him, I was angry enough to continue my studies. Amongst other things, I wanted to prove him wrong. Unwittingly, he was one of my conduits to success. In retrospect, one of the keys to success is an often-recited phrase from my primary school days, "if at first you don't succeed try and try again". The secret is first, to have someone who believes in you, and second, to move from others believing in you to you believing in yourself. The self-validation of your *own* work, your *own* accomplishments and your *own* abilities is crucial. The greatest defeat comes not from without, but from within.

This leads me into a discussion of the "success-facilitation interpretative scheme". Cordeiro and Carspecken argue that each of their 20 participants moved through the conduit stage to the development of an interpretative scheme. This frame of reference and self-organization has ten subcategories that comprise the rest of their thirteen-part model. The first subcategory involves the students distancing themselves from any negative stereotypes of their minority group (282). This is also true in my Montreal study. The four female participants happily embrace their black heritage. However, they are careful to separate themselves from the negative interpretations of that same heritage. For example, they do not entertain notions of black students (and people) as lazy, as troublemakers, as academic under-achievers who are only interested in sports, music and clothes. They are careful in their own conduct, especially

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around non-blacks, to dispel these hurtful, untrue images. In their own ways, they want to send a clear message that to be black, to be a professional, to be academically accomplished, is not an oxymoron.

In the second sub-classification the researchers observed that the students created a separate personal identity from the identity established within the confines of the home. In the students' minds, the home culture is associated with lack of achievement, backwardness and other negative images. Therefore, part of their success strategy involved placing a limitation on what they embraced from their home environment (283).

This reaction was not seen in my own study. The composition of the home environments did not discourage academic achievement. However, one should note that this factor was one of the criteria for participant selection in Cordeiro and Carspeken's study but not in mine. Cordeiro and Carspecken had already isolated this variable before beginning their research. I, on the other hand, was looking solely for black participants who had overcome the odds. I had not yet identified family structure as an important variable. It was by happenstance that the role of the home environment unfolded as I proceeded. It was also unforeseen that all of the participants' parents inspired success in some manner. My findings make the phenomenon of minority success in Cordeiro and Carspecken's study even more remarkable. One gains a real appreciation and respect for these 20 incredible students who really were the minority of a minority. It would be fascinating to see if I would arrive at the same findings if I

were to duplicate their study. Here is yet another possibility to consider for future research.

The third strategy in the success-facilitation interpretative scheme is the adoption of dominant views of success. Cordeiro and Carspecken advocate that for each of the students, the purpose of educational attainment was to move up the social ladder by becoming professionals who earned large salaries. In essence, "success was an identity issue, a way of proving stereotypes wrong" (283-284). This is both applicable and not applicable to my own study. I agree that success embodied some of the materialistic aims and preoccupations of the larger North American society. However, I found that one of the main reasons my participants wanted to be more financially comfortable was so that their families, in turn, would be more comfortable. Sandra, in particular, talked about making her mother's life easier. She wanted her to enjoy a more relaxed, less stressful life after years of struggle and financial scarcity. Of course, I cannot say that the 20 Hispanic students did not have similar motivations. It may just be that Cordeiro and Carspceken did not articulate these sentiments in the discussion of their findings.

The fourth strategy the researchers observed was membership in an achieving friendship group and segregation. In several interviews, Cordeiro and Carpsecken noted that the students pointed to membership in an achieving group as crucial to school success. They mentioned that it was important to have a group of students from similar backgrounds with which to compete in order to do well at school (284-285). A similar sentiment was echoed in my

study. Participants recalled at least one classmate with whom they competed on a regular basis. The desire to outperform that individual helped them to stay focused on their schoolwork. This was particularly important in subject areas that did not come as naturally to them. Furthermore, all of the participants alluded to the importance of belonging to an achieving group even now. They all stressed the importance of surrounding themselves with positive, progressive, professional people. For example, Sandra belongs to several professional organizations. One of them is specific to black professional women, and another caters to black engineers. When I asked why these types of affiliations were necessary, the responses were virtually unanimous. One participant put it this way. There is a lazy tendency in each of us, there is a willingness to settle for mediocrity, to just take the easy route in life. This seems to be the opinion of the larger portion of society. When you surround yourself with ambitious individuals who refuse to "just settle", you are constantly pushed to rise to a higher level of personal attainment. They remind you that you once had lofty dreams and that you can still achieve them if you apply yourself to the task at hand. When you are a visible minority, these sort of people are even more important.

The final five subcategories centre on strategic action oriented towards success. In other words, systematic goal setting was evident in the lives of the 20 Hispanic students. They handled economic constraints by working part time while in school. This was very common because they all came from poor families and they needed money to continue school. Financial issues were a big concern with regards to college attendance. The prospects of going to an

American college demanded an even larger outlay of cash than at the high school level. The enormous demands on the students' time from both the school, home and job front, forced them to manage their time carefully. The students developed surprising, but understandable coping mechanisms to balance these demands. They cheated on assignments and exams when necessary. Cordeiro and Carspecken came to realize that even the cheating was systematic. The researchers found that the students only cheated in certain classes. If they believed that the teachers were unfair in their testing practices, or were poor educators, they cheated in their classes. Conversely, there were some teachers who were highly respected and therefore, there were no incidents of cheating in their classes. In addition, the 20 students developed a system for dealing with inept teachers. These actions ranged from doing homework from other classes during the disliked teachers' class time to petitioning for their removal from the school. In general, the 20 students clearly exhibited a keen understanding of the rules of the high achievers' game. They learned what types of behaviour were applauded and which were frowned on in the school culture. They adapted their own behaviour to suit. They learned how to impress their teachers with an image of industriousness and identification with school goals (285-288).

Some of these final five strategies were indirectly addressed in my interviews. The issue of personal financial constraints was not discussed but I am aware that all of the participants, save one, had to work at some point during their studies. They had to pay for their fees, school books etc. This was

particularly true at the university level, even if only on a part-time basis. The need for proper time management is essential. I took a peek at Sandra's timetable. The way every hour is accounted for, Monday through Sunday, was incredible. Even time for relaxation and exercise had to be scheduled.

Issues of cheating and dealing with difficult teachers were not discussed at all. I cannot infer from the data I collected, how any of the participants, other than myself, would deal with these situations. I do not recall using tactics of cheating but I do remember finishing assignments in other teachers' classes. This was usually when I did not have time to complete them at home rather than an indictment of the educator's poor teaching style. Nonetheless, they were some teachers that I dared not try this in their class. I am not sure if this was because I feared them or because I respected them. It was probably a combination of both these emotions.

Playing the high achievers' game was not explicitly discussed either. However, there is much to suggest how the participants employed this strategy to ensure their scholastic success. In my own case, I remember being very careful of how I presented myself. I was careful not to act like the "trouble makers" in the class. When you were quiet and attentive, or at least appeared to be so, you received favourable attention from the teachers. I must agree with Cordeiro and Carspecken that being successful at school means knowing how to navigate the intricacies of the school system. You learn how to speak, when to speak and what is acceptable to say. In the words of Cordeiro and Carspecken, you quickly learned how to "maintain a school-referenced identity" (288).

Chapter Three

Conclusion: Present Shortcomings, Future Directions

I can see several areas where the present study can be improved. One such area is the sample size and composition. I would have preferred to have a sample of at least 10 to 12 individuals. As part of this sample, I would have preferred to have non-minority students as well as students from different socio-economic backgrounds. I believe this would help to isolate which conditions and scholastic challenges are attributable to race, ethnicity, gender or economic level and which sentiments and challenges are shared regardless of these divisions. This is one area that I must improve to make my doctoral research more comprehensive.

I am also somewhat disappointed with my literature review. I would have liked to do some more reading of George Herbert Mead's analyses of the intrinsic link between the mind and society. In addition, a review of some of the literature on the resistance and psychological resiliency of successful minority members would also have been helpful. This is an aspect of minority success which I must address in my future studies. Moreover, my introduction to the historical studies of blacks in Montreal and in Canada was rather delayed. I hope to have a closer look at this type of literature also for my Ph.D. work. It will help to give me a contextual understanding of the black Canadian reality throughout the centuries. A keen appreciation of where we have come from will help us to identify why we are where we are now, and the paths we must take to guarantee a better future.

My future studies promise to examine minority education from a broader perspective. At that time, I will take into account issues of critical pedagogy, comparative education on a cross-cultural level and the effects of gender and social class. The data I collect may solidify the arguments presented at the Masters' level. I expect that my findings will identify that although the social structure greatly impacts success or failure (an Ogbu argument), a major factor in both Canadian and Barbadian society is the presence of powerful figures or moments with which the student identifies. This individual or event leads the students to develop a deeply personal attachment to their studies and so triggers/ignites in them a strong commitment to academic success.

Furthermore, I expect that the role of social class will be more significant in the Barbadian context. Although gradations of "blackness" are still important there, the homogeneity of the society ensures that prescribed rather than ascribed characteristics become delineating factors/ reasons for distinction. That is, in Barbados, where you live, what your parents do for a living, what secondary school you attend or attended, to which social class you belong etc. replace "whiteness" in the general North American context as the face of academic and professional success in that society.

Another issue that must be addressed is the role of literacy and language in the schooling process. In particular, it becomes crucial to examine how these issues promote the politics of inclusion and exclusion in Canadian (and specifically Montreal) society. The language/literacy factor is inescapable. The academic contributions of Cook-Gumperz (1986), Trueba, Guthrie and Au

(1981), Trueba et al. (1990), Tharp and Gallimore (1988), Marsella et al. (1979) and other thinkers highlight this fact. I have come to the conclusion that one cannot discuss formal or informal education without touching on the role that culture plays in the construction of that schooling. The school institution is a culture's arm of socialization and as such it determines the "haves" from the "have-nots". Consequently, the minority groups within the institution and thus the society, are almost always at a disadvantage. The ineffective treatment of minority educational needs in the early years translates into exclusion from higher levels of education. This, in turn, bars them from positions of authority in the professional and political environments in which they live. In short, this is a vicious cycle. It is my assertion that, in general, this is exactly what happens to black anglophone students in Montreal.

Other improvements and concentrations are also possible in my Ph.D. research. For instance, if I choose to focus on the literacy/language aspect of minority education, I may need to have two samples. One group should comprise black anglophones and the other should be made up of black francophones from roughly the same social class. The aim would be to uncover whether language differences have created differences in academic and professional achievement or in their commitment to the Quebec society. I expect that the attitudes and opportunities for the two groups would be markedly different. I suspect that black francophones would have more positive experiences and more hopeful expectations for their future in Quebec personally, professionally and politically.

Having said all of this, I believe a more integrated approach is imperative for my research to be truly valuable. I need to move from a micro-individual type of examination (which is the basis of my M.A. work) to a more macro-societal exploration of minority education (the focus of the Ph.D. work). To this end, I hope to conduct a study that encapsulates (mainly) three disciplines: minority and education, social and cultural anthropology and public policy and public administration. I expect that although the study will be cross-cultural (much of the research on this area is derived from American and British studies and this will be contrasted, tentatively at this stage, with Barbadian examples), the paths to success will be very similar. What remains to be seen is how the educational policies in the various societies will differ or mirror each other in their treatment of minority educational needs. As a result, how do these policies help or hinder the educational success of the minorities who live in these societies?

Firstly, I will draw on the field of minority and comparative education. I want to take the courses, *School and Society* and *Education of Immigrants and Minorities*. These will complement the knowledge I already possess, especially situating the challenges and realities of education into a macrocosmic context.

Secondly, I will draw on the field of social and cultural anthropology. I will borrow the domain's use of narrative and ethnography to enhance my research on minority education in various Western and non-Western societies. The anthropology angle will help to pinpoint the ethical and responsible way to conduct this type of inter-cultural research.

Ethnography is very relevant to the field of minority education. The tried-and-true methodologies and educational research designs of old have failed to answer many pressing questions. The approaches which were experimental or that attempted to establish correlation without examining social and cultural contexts have been unfruitful (Spindler 1982:3). We now see that an approach that encompasses the culture of the student and of the classroom can no longer be overlooked.

The contribution of cultural anthropology is instructive in another way. I expect that there will be differences in the performance of males and females with the latter out-performing the former. There is a need to explain this phenomenon, particularly because I am convinced that this is a reality among non-minority students as well. Perhaps, however, being an ethnic minority exacerbates the problem. With these aims and expectations in mind, I am particularly excited to take the courses, *Gender, Ethnicity and Class in Anthropological Theory, New developments in Inter-cultural Research, Ethnography, Ethics and Inter-cultural Skills* and *Writing Methods in Inter-cultural Communication.*

Thirdly, I plan to delve into political science. Continuing with the macro-level approach, it is important to have a keen understanding of issues of public policy and public administration. In light of this, my interests lie in three of the concentrations: public administration and decision-making, public policy and social political theory and international public policy and administration, if I decide to include a cross-cultural analysis.

Another area that I overlooked in the current study is the French literature that relates to minority education and minority status in Quebec and Canada. In particular, there is a vast body of work on the political policies that impact on minority populations within these regions. For example, it is essential to consider the research on Quebec immigration policies, as well as other government decisions on multiculturalism and integration of newcomers into the Quebec society. These policies help to shape the environment of the classroom. As such, any significant intervention in the classroom must come from political directives at the governmental level. Indeed, Tureba, Jacobs and Kirton surmise that positive change for minority students must be facilitated by both macro and micro-level efforts. "A concerted effort on the part of educational researchers, school administrators, community representatives and students themselves may still salvage instructional effectiveness and prevent the socioeconomic marginalization of minority students" (1990: xx). I would add that for positive change to endure for Canadian minorities, it must also be supported by review, improvement and/or implementation at the level of policy. In the long run, "academic success or academic failure are not caused by a single social institution, such as school or family, but by a whole set of institutions (religious, political and economic) which provide children with experiences that maximize or curtail cognitive development. In this sense, both academic success and academic failure are socially constructed phenomena" (Trueba, Jacobs & Kirton 1990: 4). In the same manner, no single institution can solve the problem. This is why an integrated approach is so crucial.

Although community-based projects are important and have resulted in positive changes for a few, these successes are too scattered and infrequent to affect larger numbers of minorities in Canada. What becomes clear is that the teachers and administrators are enculturated into the status quo of how the North American society is to be structured (Spindler 1982: 270). The unjust exclusion of blacks and other minorities in Quebec and Canada will continue unless there is significant intervention from outside the classroom as well as from within. This intervention must take place at the level of policy. I must reiterate that a larger framework is needed to have a major impact on the provincial and national stage. My masters' work has started me on that path and my Ph.D., and subsequent teaching and research work, will be a small but valuable contribution in this direction.

A man who succeeds in life must not only know where he is going, but must settle within his mind, with an unshakable faith, that he is indeed capable of reaching any port no matter how rough the sea or how distant the destination. Realizing this, he can remove any outside influence that may attempt to discourage him. Applied faith is the voice of authority speaking to all those who will prevail, no matter the odds or difficulties. (Kimbro & Hill 1991: 129)

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE/QUESTIONS

1. Were you always a good student?
2. What major obstacles, if any, did you encounter to your academic success?
3. What were your main motivations/what were the motivating factors that led to your academic success?
4. What role, if any, did family, friends or other significant figure(s) play in your success?
5. If any of the above were significant, how so? What did they do or say to cause you to take school and scholastic achievement seriously?
6. What are your plans for the future? Do you plan to stay and contribute to Montreal and Quebec society?

<u>**Appendix 2**</u>

<u>**CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**</u>

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Nicola Martin as part of her MA thesis under the supervision of Pro. Ailie Cleghorn of the Department of Education at Concordia University.

A. PURPOSE
I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to identify the reasons for the academic success of young black anglophones who have grown up in the Montreal area.

B. PROCEDURES
The research will be conducted in Montreal. The data will be collected through formal and informal interviews. The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes-1 hour. However, the length of each interview will be determined by each participant. There will be no threats to the respondents' psychological or physical well-being. In addition, for reasons of confidentiality, the names of the participants will be changed when their information is documented in public (either verbally or in writing).

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION
* I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
* I understand that my participation in this study is completely CONFIDENTIAL (ie. The researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity)
* I understand that the data from this study may be published
* I understand the purpose of this study and know that there is no hidden motive of which I have not been informed.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

_____

SIGNATURE:

_____

WITNESS
SIGNATURE:_____

DATE:_____