THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN BLACK YOUTH RAISED IN A RACIALLY DISSONANT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

by

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The Process of Identity Formation in Black Youth Raised in a Racially Dissonant Social Environment

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ABSTRACT

The process of identity formation in black youth, of Caribbean heritage, residing in the greater Vancouver region of British Columbia, is the general focus of this research. As there is a relatively small black population within this region, black youth are raised in an environment which has been referred to by social psychology theorists and researchers as being racially dissonant. It was anticipated that the experiences of black youth raised in greater Vancouver may be quite dissimilar to the experiences of black youth raised in metropolitan cities in Canada and the United States where there is a larger black community. Some comparisons are made with studies which focused on the process of identity formation in black youth residing in the United States.

Various theories of ethnic identity development were used to guide this investigation. The general research question was: What is the nature of the relationship between visible minority status and the process of identity formation in youth? In particular, sociological and psychological factors which may impact the development of self-concept and self-esteem are examined.

Twenty participants, ten females and ten males, between 13 and 18 years of age were interviewed during this investigation. All participants were born in Canada and were of Caribbean parentage. The data gathered was analyzed on the basis of a conceptual framework devised by the researcher based on ethnographic and qualitative research approaches.

The results of this investigation indicate that black youth raised in the greater Vancouver region develop a generally positive self-concept and high self-esteem, though
in a racially dissonant social environment. Factors that may be strong influences on identity formation include family and close friends, in particular black friends, and the development of coping strategies and a system of support for black youth.

This research has important implications for the educational system, particularly in terms of support structures within the school environment and the formal curriculum used. The research indicates that black youth do not view school personnel as being receptive and responsive to their issues. Additionally, results indicate that black youth perceive the experiences and contributions of black people in Canada, both historically and currently, to be both misrepresented and under represented in school curriculum.
This thesis is dedicated to Neville Clarke and Vashti Clarke

who have sacrificed much in order to provide opportunities for me.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis presents an investigation of the process of identity formation of black youth, of Caribbean/West Indian heritage, raised in British Columbia's lower mainland. Though the descriptor 'Caribbean' is the official term used by the Canadian government when describing the group to which these youth belong, the term West Indian was the more common self-descriptor used by the youth themselves. Therefore, these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

The purpose of the investigation was to attempt to discern the degree to which the identities of these youth were shaped by their social environment. I also sought to ascertain the youth's perceptions of their formative experiences. The investigation also sought to identify coping strategies used by the youth throughout the developmental process.

Following the introduction, chapter one is a literature review, which provides an overview of relevant research related to this topic. The first section of the literature review presents definitions of the key concepts used in this investigation. The concepts to be defined are race, ethnicity, culture, identity, self-concept, and self-esteem. The definitions are followed by a review of literature pertaining to the sociological and psychological factors which impact identity development.

In chapter two a review of the ethnographic and qualitative research literature which has influenced the development of this investigation is provided. The methodology used in
the investigation is outlined. The possible researcher biases and limitations are put forward, as well as the researcher’s personal beliefs. A summary of the research questions and hypotheses which guided the investigation is presented.

In chapter three the data is presented, analysed and interpreted. And finally, in chapter four, conclusions are drawn from the data analysis and interpretation. These conclusions are compared to the original research questions and hypotheses. Comparisons are also made to the conclusions of related research.

**Literature Review**

Much of the literature that pertains to identity formation in visible minority youth is also applicable to members of minority ethnic groups who are not racial minorities. However, there appears to be a difference, in that unlike other ethnic groups who can successfully assimilate into the mainstream over a period of time, visible minority group members must continually deal with unique experiences that are based on their physical differences.

The literature review is divided into two subsections. The focus of the first section is definitions of the key concepts used in this investigation. The second section reviews literature related to sociological and psychological factors which impact identity development in visible minority youth. A review of qualitative and ethnographic research designs is presented in chapter two, along with the methodology, researcher beliefs, limitations and biases, and the research questions.

**Definitions**

The purpose of this section is to provide definitions for concepts used throughout the investigation. The concepts of race, ethnicity and culture will now be discussed and
defined. These three terms are often used interchangeably, but there are important distinctions to be made. The term 'race' was originally used by biologists and physical anthropologists to refer to a set of physical or biological characteristics shared by a group of people (Anderson & Frideres, 1981; Burkey, 1978; Isajiw, 1980; Smith, 1989).

Though the term is still used within this context by some, many theorists look upon race as a social construct rather than as a reference to innate physical or genetic types. Race is ascribed rather than assumed (Banks, 1985; Isajiw, 1980; MacCarthy, 1990). "Race is a human invention constructed by groups to differentiate themselves from other groups, to create ideas about the 'Other', to formulate their identities, and to defend the disproportionate distribution of rewards and opportunities within society" (Banks, 1995, p. 22).

Ethnicity refers to the group identity that has been developed in a people through a common origin, history, and experiences. Ethnicity is based on shared racial origins, cultural values and traditions, territorial or national ties, language, and religion. It is not necessary for all of these characteristics to be present, though a combination of some, if not all, is likely in a given ethnic group (Anderson & Frideres, 1983; Burnet, 1981; Isajiw, 1980; McCready, 1983; Smith, 1989). Ethnic groups have been defined as being 'social collectives' (Burkey, 1978). Mithun (1983) defines an ethnic group as being "...people who share a sense of traditions, be that derived from religious, physical, linguistic, aesthetic, or historical origins" (p.210). Ethnic groups develop boundaries (e.g., territory, language, customs, religion, etc.) through which they can identify group members and outsiders (Banks, 1995). In contrast to race, ethnicity can be ascribed by the
larger society, but it can also be assumed through self-identification. An individual's ethnic identity may change over time or an individual may incorporate more than one ethnic identity (Burnet, 1981).

Culture has been defined as being the "...shared symbolic meaning of specific social units or social collectives" (Burkey, 1978, p. 7). Culture is socially acquired and transmitted through learning. It is inclusive of language, mythology, beliefs, values, rituals, artifacts, manners, and institutions (Anderson & Frideres, 1983; Burnet, 1981; Shade & New, 1993; Teper, 1977).

Race, ethnicity, and culture are closely connected terms. Some theorists identify race and culture as aspects of one's ethnicity (Anderson and Frideres, 1983). Often individuals who share a particular ethnicity and culture also share the same racial heritage. However, in a diverse society, such as Canada, the ethnic and cultural boundaries are increasingly blurred, though racial differences in comparison, appear to remain fairly stable. Thus, we have within our society First Nations peoples, and Canadians of Anglo-Saxon, French, African, Indian, Asian, and mixed heritages (Anderson & Frideres, 1983; Moodley, 1995; Burnet, 1981).

The terms identity, self-concept, and self-esteem are an intrinsic part of the psychological literature pertaining to ethnic identity development. My research focus is specifically on factors which affect self-concept and, in particular, the development of positive or negative self-esteem in visible minority youth. I acknowledge the longstanding tradition of research into issues of identity formation, self-esteem, and self-concept. Theorists and researchers who have contributed much to this area include Adler...
(Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956), Allport (1937, 1950, 1960), Erikson (1950, 1968), Freud (1933), and Mead (1934). In particular, the work of Erik Erikson (1950, 1968) has greatly influenced this research due to his focus on the processes of identity formation as they relate to youth. However, due to the specific focus of this research, it is not my aim to redefine these general concepts but rather to recognize them as the foundation upon which this research has been built. This study sought to determine the applicability of the concepts outlined to the context of this investigation.

Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) described the identity as being inclusive of physical characteristics, personality traits, and social personas. These authors further stated that the identity also contains what has been labelled the 'self-system'. The self-system includes the dimensions of self-perception and self-development. Within these dimensions exist the subcategories of self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness, and locus of control. According to Erikson, "components of the self-system, in particular, self-esteem and self-concept are operative prior to ego-identity formation and later become part of the identity" (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990, p. 291).

Self-concept research has produced contradictory findings (Bednar & Peterson, 1995): While some researchers view the self-concept as being a subcategory of the identity (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990), other researchers view self-concept and identity as being synonymous terms (Banks, 1981). Additionally, while some researchers view the self-concept as being a "unitary, global construct," other researchers believe that self-concept is actually composed of several selves. Furthermore, the researchers who postulate the existence of several selves within the self-concept, speculate that
disagreements between these selves may lead to the creation of "a cognitive mechanism whereby negative self-esteem may be experienced" (Bedner & Peterson, 1995, p. 47). Bedner and Peterson (1995) defined self-concept as being the process of self-definition which occurs in individuals. These authors further stated that as the process of self-definition advances, the self-concept becomes increasing self-protective and resistant to change.

According to Bednar and Peterson (1995), self-esteem is "a subjective and enduring sense of realistic self-approval. It reflects how the individual views and values the self at the most fundamental levels of psychological experiencing " (p. 4). Self-esteem was defined by Metha and Nielson (1994) as being "the multidimensional evaluative dimension of the self-concept " (p. 526). Rosenberg stated that "Self-esteem is based on our concept of our own worthiness, which is determined not only by self-perceptions but also by interpretations of feedback from significant others" (McCreary, 1989, p.581). In other words, self-esteem is the positive or negative values one places upon one's concept of self.

**Sociological Perspective**

Attempts to understand the dynamics of identity formation in visible minority youth must take into account both sociological and psychological influences, as conflicts and confusion may develop due to difficulties within both spheres.

From the sociological perspective, there are a number of theories in regard to the socialization of visible minority groups into the mainstream. In the book *The Invisible Child*, Rist (1978) summarized four major alternative approaches which are utilized by societies and/or educational systems in the process of attempted integration. The four
major categories are: integration as class assimilation, integration as class pluralism, integration as racial assimilation, and, integration as racial pluralism.

Integration as class assimilation.

This position is based on the notion of an ideal society which is open, socially mobile, and free for equal participation of all its citizens. From this point of view, disadvantaged persons are in their situation because they have not learned the rules of social mobility. In other words, the personal cultures of the disadvantaged works against the system. Therefore disadvantaged people cannot become upwardly mobile unless they learn to conform to the values of the mainstream. Society takes no responsibility for class differences which appear to be racially based because, in theory, the society's social and economic system is nondiscriminatory and nonrestrictive.

In the context of class assimilation, the educational system functions to instill mainstream values into minority or disadvantaged children. The underlying premise is that through being socialized into the behaviours and values of the mainstream of society, minority children will have the same aspirations as other children, thus, they will become a part of the mainstream. In this context the educational system does not value the racial or ethnic differences of children. These differences are viewed as being inconsequential. In fact, if special efforts are made on behalf of the minority children it amounts to reverse discrimination in the opinion of class assimilationists (Rist, 1978).

Integration as class pluralism.

Integration as class pluralism puts forward the idea that each class has its own value system which must be respected by society at large. This notion could be interpreted as
suggesting that lower class children should be taught to take pride in values which may in fact serve to reinforce their poverty and contribute to the provision of minimal opportunity for upward social mobility.

Many western societies (especially North America) are structured on the principle of upward mobility. The notions of class pluralism are totally out of tune with this principle. In addition, few parents would want an educational system to teach their children to take pride in their poverty (Rist, 1978). Furthermore, it is my contention that the notion of integration as class pluralism may be viewed quite unfavourably, by members of lower socioeconomic groups, as a tool of the affluent classes that works to maintain the existing social hierarchy.

Integration as racial assimilation.

Integration as racial assimilation is based on the assumption that integration can be accomplished through socializing non-white students into the beliefs, behaviours, and values of white students. The racial assimilationist viewpoint maintains that by imitating the cultural pattern of the dominant group, minority group members will be accepted into the mainstream of society (Rist, 1978).

Integration as racial pluralism.

In contrast to the racial assimilationist point-of-view, integration as racial pluralism stresses the idea that all cultural beliefs are of equal value and deserve to be respected in their own right. This position postulates a society in which all cultures are recognized and members of all ethnic groups can take pride in their heritage (Rist, 1978).

The racial pluralist position promotes the idea of significant levels of interaction
between ethnic groups, in order to foster a better understanding of each other (Rist, 1978). Within the educational system this is an ideal which has been with us for quite some time. In 1935 DuBois wrote, "Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts; it inspires greater self-confidence; and suppresses the inferiority complex." (Bagley, et al., 1979, p.177).

Schools in which there is a great deal of positive contact between students of differing ethnic backgrounds are likely to contribute to individuals with positive self-concepts. This, in turn, may lead to more productive, more successful adulthoods (Bagley, et al., 1979).

The racial stratification system.

In his book, Minority Education and Caste, Ogbu (1978) addressed the issue of the racial stratification system within a society and its impact on the educational process. Ogbu developed a typology of minority groups in which three types are represented. According to Ogbu, within a given society, (a) autonomous minorities, (b) caste minorities, and (c) immigrant minorities may be represented. Ogbu's typology will now be outlined.

Ogbu stated that though numerically smaller than the dominant group, autonomous minorities are not totally dependent upon the economic or political system of the dominant group. He further stated that assimilation is not a goal for autonomous minorities as they do not view the dominant group as their group of reference.
Ogbu described caste minorities as being politically and economically subordinate to the dominant group in the society. It was Ogbu's contention that the dominant group regard themselves as being superior to caste minorities in all respects. He further argued that caste minorities accept and often internalize the ideology used by the dominant group to rationalize the existing stratification system. He also contended that, in general, caste minorities do not occupy the most desired roles in the society, regardless of individual qualifications and training.

And finally, Ogbu placed immigrant minorities between the autonomous minority and the caste minority. He observes that generally speaking, immigrant minorities have voluntarily emigrated to the host community. Unlike caste minorities, immigrant minorities tend to operate outside of the established stratification system, as they are less accepting of, and affected by, the 'rationalization ideology' of the dominant group.

Ogbu argued that, for the immigrant minority, their group of reference is not the dominant group in the host society, it is the people of their home of origin. Therefore, they are not necessarily seeking equality with the dominant group, they are seeking an improvement in their economic situation relative to their situation in their country of origin. He further argued that because immigrant minorities tend to be quite goal-oriented and purposeful in their emigration, they accept that they must deal with prejudice and discrimination as a price for achieving those goals. According to Ogbu, unlike the other two types of minority group, the immigrant minority has the option of leaving the host country and returning to the country of origin.

Ogbu also noted that it is possible for individuals to move from one type of minority
group to another. Change may be dependent on the social environments in which the individuals find themselves. Change can also occur over generations. For example, the children or grandchildren of immigrant minorities may exhibit greater caste minority characteristics than immigrant minority characteristics.

I intend to examine the applicability of Ogbu's typology to the experiences of the youth interviewed for this study as I analyse and interpret the data. I am aware that the applicability may be limited as Ogbu's typology was developed in the context of the experiences of racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States. The historical and social context of the group I am studying are quite different than those of the groups upon which Ogbu's typology is based. However, Ogbu did argue that the typology he has developed is applicable to any society in which a racial stratification system exists.

Psychological Perspective

Turning now to the psychological perspective, there are various theories of identity development and ethnic identity development. Piaget's (Wagner, 1987), Erikson's (1968), and Marcia's (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990) general identity development theories will be discussed, followed by the ethnic identity development models of Cross (Gay, 1985) and Banks (1976, 1981). Research literature related to the ethnic identity development models will then be presented.

Piaget's model of cognitive development supports the postulation that issues of ethnic identity are brought into conscious awareness of minority group members during the adolescent years (Wagner, 1987). According to Piaget, formal operations, which is the highest form of reasoning, emerges during adolescence. The adolescent has the ability to
envision possibilities beyond that which is present and immediate. "Formal operations provide adolescents with the cognitive tools to develop a sense of identity" (Wagner, 1987, p.23). This implies that the adolescent now has the ability to assess the complex interrelationships between the racial and social stratification systems in society, and his or her ethnicity. Furthermore, he or she can also draw conclusions about the positive or negative outcomes of those interactions.

The resolution of the psychosocial dilemma -ego identity vs. identity diffusion- is the major focus of the adolescent years, according to Erikson's Ego Analytic Theory (Erikson, 1968, Wagner, 1987). Erikson stated that, "In identity diffusion...a split of self-images is suggested, a loss of centre, and a dispersion." (1968, p.212). This theory further supports the belief that the adolescent years are the primary years for ethnic awareness and the ensuing conflicts which can arise within the visible minority population. According to Erikson, the negative images of various ethnic groups that pervade a society are often accepted by members of the groups as being legitimate. The acceptance of negative images leads to the development of a negative identity (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Based on Erikson's contentions, one of the 'self-images' that I would suggest the adolescent is struggling with, is the image they have of themselves in terms of their ethnic identity. This notion will be examined through the present research.

Marcia’s model of identity formation is based on Erikson's Ego Analytic Theory. Marcia described four possible identity states of an individual. These states are foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement. An individual experiencing identity foreclosure has accepted the identity of a cultural group, with all of its values, and
traditions without question or exploration. An identity diffused individual has not fully explored or committed themselves to any particular identity. The individual in a state of moratorium is engaged in intensive exploration of an identity but has yet to commit. The identity achieved individual has moved beyond the state of moratorium, or exploration, and has made a commitment to a particular identity (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

Various theories of ethnic identity formation, such as those presented by Banks (1976, 1981), Cross (Gay, 1985), Gay (1985) and Parham (1989), offer similar conceptual notions as those described in Marcia's identity formation model. For example, Cross's model of Racial Identity Development also described a four stage process of identity formation. Cross labelled his four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. In the pre-encounter stage individuals identify with the world views, and values of the dominant group while rejecting the views and values of their own racial/ethnic group. An individual in the encounter stage of development is confronted with significant events or experiences that force them to question their identification with the dominant racial group. The experience of racial discrimination is an example of a significant event. The individual then moves into the immersion-emersion stage of development. In this stage there is a shift in the individual's group of reference from the values and traditions of the dominant racial group to the values and traditions of their own racial group. While the individual immerses themself in the new identification, interactions with other racial groups are minimal. The final stage of racial identity development is internalization. The individual is confident in their new found identity.
They have resolved, for themself, much of the conflict between the values of the dominant racial group and the values of their own group. An individual in this stage of development has increased flexibility and is comfortable interacting with members of various racial/ethnic groups (Parham, 1989).

Banks’ (1981) model of racial identity development encompasses six stages. In the first stage, ethnic psychological captivity, the individual accepts the negative images and believes about his own ethnic group that is promoted in the larger society. This stage is characterized by feelings of low self-esteem and self-rejection. The second stage, ethnic encapsulation, is manifest in individuals who practice ethnic exclusiveness and engage in minimal interaction with individuals of other ethnic group. These individuals believe in the superiority of the beliefs and values of their ethnic group over the beliefs and values of other groups. In the third stage, ethnic identity clarification, the individual seeks to clarify their ethnic identity and attitudes. The ethnic pride that is manifest is genuine rather than the contrived form of pride manifest in the previous stage. According to Banks, this stage is characterized by a reduction in 'intrapsychic conflict'. The fourth stage, biethnicity, is characterized by a healthy sense of ethnic identity. Individuals are able to participate successfully both within their own cultural group and in the dominant cultural group within the society. Banks argued that self actualization is achieved in stage five, multiethnicity and reflective nationalism. Individuals in this stage exhibit positive personal, ethnic and national identities. They are able to function effectively within the norms and values of many ethnic groups. Globalism and global competency is the sixth stage of Banks’ model. In this stage the individual is able to interact effectively in many ethnic
settings not only within his or her nation, but also on a global dimension. According to Banks, this individual has incorporated 'universalistic ethical values and principles' into his or her ethnic identity.

Banks (1981) noted that the stages can be viewed as existing on the continuum. The continuum exists both between and within the stages. The boundaries between stages are flexible rather than sharp. Additionally, though individuals are likely to move through the stages in a sequential pattern this is not always the case. Stages can be skipped or repeated depending on the situations or circumstances impacting the individual.

Phinney (1989) stated that “Erikson’s (1968) theory of ego identity development, as operationalized by Marcia (1966, 1980) provide a useful starting point for studying ethnic identity in adolescence” (p.35). Additionally, in his examination of the models of identity formation of Marcia (1966), Arce (1991), Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1983), Cross (1978) and, Kim (1981), Phinney argued that in models of identity formation there are three distinct phases. According to Phinney, phase one is unexamined identity, phase two is an encounter experience which promotes an exploration of identity, and phase three is a commitment to an identity. The figure on the next page demonstrates how the identity development models of Marcia, Cross, and Banks relate to Phinney's notion of developmental phases.
I recognize that theories of identity development have been controversial on a number of levels. For example, Aries and Moorehead (1989) stated that as models of identity development originally arose as an explanation of developmental processes in the white population, they may not have the same applicability to blacks. In support of their point they cited their observations that black family life tends to be different than that of whites. According to these researchers, blacks families are more likely to consist of extended family and close friends. This extended family system provides a supportive environment in which to deal with economic and social problems.

Parham (1989), in his discussion of ethnic identity development models, noted two problems. First, he stated that most models postulate a linear, sequential movement through stages. Additionally, according to these models, an individual only passes through each stage once before identity is achieved. Parham, on the other hand believes that identity formation is a life long process in which individuals 'cycle' through the various
stages of identity more than once. The second problem related to ethnic identity models, which Parham identified, is the assumption that racial identity is simply a reaction to the oppression faced by the individual in the outside environment. Parham believes that ethnic identity development is much more complex. He stated that for black people ethnic identity is "...actualized through personal thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are rooted in the values and fabric of Black/African culture itself" (Parham, 1989, p. 195).

I am also aware that the use of identity development models as the only method of assessment, can lead to individual, unique experiences being overlooked, in the search for general patterns. Furthermore, as stated early in the discussion of Ogbu's research, the models described here derive, once again, from the American context.

Nevertheless, within the mainstream society identity models appear to have provided a foundation upon which further research into issues of identity formation have been built. As I have found no other research which examined identity formation processes in black youth of Caribbean heritage, raised in the lower mainland of British Columbia, the goal of this investigation is to examine general patterns of identity formation in this population. This pattern may or may not relate to the identity development models outlined. However, I believe that the identity development models may assist in providing a baseline or foundation related to this context as well. Therefore, I will be referring to these models as I analyse and interpret the data. In particular, I will examine the applicability of Phinney's (1989) notion of developmental phases to the data gathered.
The Childhood Years

Many ethnic identity development theorists describe childhood as being a period of unconscious acceptance of the existing social order (Banks, 1976; Gay, 1985; Poussaint & Atkinson, 1972). Cross's model of ethnic development described the childhood years as a time of "ethnic innocence" (Gay, 1985). Gay (1978) believed the childhood years to be the preconceptual stage of ethnic identity.

Cohen & Manion (1983), outlined a 1975 British study conducted by Milner. In the study, differences of identity formation and racial preference in a sample of white, West Indian, and Asian children, between 5 and 8 years of age, were investigated. One hundred children from each ethnic group were included in the study. The children were shown three dolls which were alike in every aspect other than racial characteristics. One doll was white, another was black, and the other doll was Asian. The children were each asked three questions: -Which doll do you like most?, (preference), -Which doll looks most like you?, (identity), -Which one of these two men is the bad man? (stereotype).

The results were as follows:

Identity - Which doll looks most like you?

- 100% of the white children chose the white doll
- 45% of the West Indian children chose the white doll
- 24% of the Asian children chose the white doll

Preference - Which doll do you like best?

- 100% of the white children chose the white doll
- 82% of the West Indian children chose the white doll
- 65% of the Asian children chose the white doll
Stereotype - Which one of these two men is the bad man?

0% of the white children had negative stereotypes about their own group
72% of the West Indian children had negative stereotypes about their own group
65% of the Asian children had negative stereotypes about their own group

The results of this study indicate that the majority of children have an accurate sense of identity as illustrated by the fact while all of the white children stated that the white doll most resembled them, 55% of the West Indian children and 66% of the Asian children did not choose the white doll. It is disconcerting however to find that a significant number of the West Indian and Asia children sampled did identify with the white dolls.

The more significant findings in the study were in the areas of preference and stereotyping. The findings suggest that even very young children in the society know the values placed on belonging to particular ethnic groups. "In societies which accord inferior status to racial minorities, children learn from a very early age the relative worth of being a black or white person" (Cohen and Manion, 1983, p.82).

Minority children may have shown a preference for white identification over their own race not necessarily because they felt that white was intrinsically better, but because they recognized that it is easier to become a successful member of the society as a member of the dominant racial group than it is as a member of their own group.

Spencer's (1982) evaluation of the processes involved in a minority child's preference of dominant cultural group values was similar to the assertions of Cohen and Manion. Spencer (1982) pointed out that minority group children tend to exhibit a preference for majority group values, when given a choice between majority group values and the values of their own ethnic group. Eurocentrism was the term used by Spencer to describe this
preference. According to Spencer, minority group children may be quite comfortable with their personal identities, even though they perceive their racial group as being less valued in society than the dominant racial group. Spencer believed that racial stereotypes are not internalized by young children but are processed as objective information. In other words, for a young child, personal identity and racial identity are unconnected concepts.

As children move into adolescence issues of ethnic identity become a greater focus. "Somewhere between eight and twelve children begin to 'place' themselves and their families in the social status structure that they have begun to observe" (Comer, 1989, p. 355).

Adolescence

Childhood experiences are extremely important as they are major contributors to the concept of self which will emerge during the adolescent years. Difficulties may arise during the adolescent years because adolescents have developed the conceptual tools to understand their victimization by the social system, whether it be due to issues of race, gender, or class (Comer, 1989, Wagner, 1987). Additionally, adolescence is a period in which the individual struggles for independence from family. The adolescent may no longer want to rely on the family as the source of positive feelings of self-worth. They want to feel competent, self-confident, and have positive self-esteem, in a number of social milieus. It is my belief that the many barriers that minority adolescents are faced with, due to their ethnicity, make it more difficult for them to have positive feelings of self-worth than for adolescents of the dominant ethnicity. The establishment of a positive self-worth in adolescence is extremely important as research suggests that the conceptualization of
self-worth established in adolescence is carried into adulthood without alteration. At the conclusion of a 10 year longitudinal study Barnes (1985) stated that, "For the majority of youth, self-concept remained relatively stable over this 16 year period. If one has a negative self-concept when entering adolescence, one will enter adulthood with the same negative feeling" (p. 203).

There seems to be a level of agreement amongst identity developmental researchers such as Erikson (1986) and Piaget (Wagner, 1987) that the adolescent years are associated with the second phase of identity formation. Peshkin and White (1990) stated that, "Psychologists see the later stages of adolescence as a psychosocial moratorium when alternatives are tried out and accepted or rejected in a continuing quest for coherence between personally conceived internal and external realities" (p.23). Peshkin and White further stated that in this stage adolescents are making decisions about the selves they are to become. They are evolving both a personal identity and their reference group orientation. Reference group orientation includes decisions in regards to one's religious, social, and ethnic affiliations.

For the black adolescent the second stage of identity development includes a conscious confrontation with his or her ethnic identity. "The pervasiveness of individual and institutional racism...compels black adolescents to deal with the ethnic component of self" (Peshkin & White,1990, p.23). This confrontation may be preceded by a positive or negative experience. The experience may be internal or external, an individual experience, or a social reality or event which affects the entire ethnic group. Negative confrontation resolution is often manifest through feelings of inadequacy, lowered self-esteem,
self-hatred, ethnic group hatred, and attempts to dissociate from one's ethnic group. An individual in this category of negative resolution cannot relate well to other ethnic groups, and often exhibits a great deal of hostility towards them (Banks, 1976; Parham, 1989). Conversely, positive confrontation resolution is manifested in positive feelings of self-worth, acceptance, appreciation, and pride in one's ethnic group and its contributions to society (Banks, 1976; Parham, 1989). An individual in this category of positive confrontation resolution relates well to members of other ethnic groups, and is comfortable in a variety of cultural settings. Banks (1976) describes this individual as being multiethnic (Banks, 1976, Parham, 1989).

The adolescent stage for the visible minority serves the dual purpose of transforming the individual from a child to an adult, which is a common experience to all members of society, and of enabling the individual to consciously become a participating member of a minority ethnic group, an experience unique to minority youths (Gay, 1985).

During the adolescence there is a re-evaluation of early identifications. Under intrinsic and extrinsic pressure, the adolescent faces the dilemma of acceptance or repudiation of childhood identifications. This personal crisis is related to the dynamics of the family and to the history of the group (Mendelberg, 1986, p.218).

A study by Hurtsfield (1978) concluded that there were significant differences between the self-concepts of Anglo adolescents and the self-concepts of minority group adolescents. Anglos were much more individualistic. They rarely mentioned their membership in a particular ethnic group. Anglos strongly emphasized their personal tastes, possessions, and abilities. These adolescents were much more apt to describe their
physical attributes. They placed great importance on body image. Hurtsfield hypothesized that because one's body image is a reflection of one's ethnicity, these adolescents were unconsciously expressing pride in their dominant ethnic group membership.

When one considers that within Canadian society overt attempts at displaying ethnic superiority are generally frowned upon, Hurtsfield's hypothesis is quite plausible. Through their association with particular physical attributes the Anglo adolescent expresses pride in their ethnic group without consciously asserting claims of superiority over any other group. In regard to the body image of adolescent minority group members, Gay (1978, p.652) stated that "frequently, the socially accepted societal models of beauty and masculinity do not accommodate ethnic and racial characteristics of culturally different groups. When early adolescents from these groups apply these criteria to themselves, the results may be devastating." Hurtsfield's study found that rather than emphasizing physical attributes, minority group members stressed ethnic and racial conceptions of self.

Hurtsfield's contentions are compatible with the hypothesis that experiences such as racial discrimination contribute to the development of low self-esteem in visible minority youth (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971). Erikson had put forward a similar contention which was reviewed previously. Additionally, Peshkin and White (1990) contended that educational researchers identify black students as being 'caste-like' minority members who come of age in a society ... where because of the stigma nonblacks often assign to color, they are apt to fuse the negative images held up to them by the dominant majority with the negative images cultivated in their own group (p.22).
The Effects Of Negative Experiences

Much of the recent research in the area of identity formation in minority youth does not support the hypothesis that negative experiences lead to the development of negative self-concepts. Some studies, which have compared the self-concepts of visible minority children and white children, have found that minority children expressed similar self-concepts to those expressed by the white children (Abound and Skerry, 1984; Harris and Stokes Jensen, et al., 1982; Rosenberg and Simmons, 1971; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; and Spencer, et al., 1987).

There are a number of ways in which researchers have attempted to explain the development of positive self-concepts in the midst of negative social experiences. A study by Rosenthal, et al., (1989) concluded that the experience of discrimination based on ethnic differences can potentially lead to increased identification with the positive aspects of one's own ethnic group. The research also proposed the hypothesis that individuals are capable of maintaining more than one social identity. Furthermore, these identities do not necessarily lead to an experience of conflict within the individual. The existence of multiple social identities enables the individual to interact effectively in diverse social arenas.

Consonant and Dissonant Social Contexts

Rosenberg and Simmon's (1971) research identified a variable that may be an important factor in understanding the development of self-concept in visible minority youth. Their research focused on consonant and dissonant social contexts in which visible minority youth are socialized. In a consonant social context, the child's immediate environment is
chiefly populated with members of their own racial group. In a dissonant social context, the child's immediate environment is chiefly populated with members of another racial group. In the research discussed here the social context involved was the school environment. Research concluded that children in a racially dissonant school environment manifested lower self-esteem than children in a racially consonant school environment (Verna & Runion, 1985).

The racial/ethnic mix of a school's student population also seems to be correlated with the willingness of teachers and administrators to formally address the issue of ethnicity in the curriculum. In their study on the Vancouver School Board multiculturalism policy, Fisher and Echols (1989) reported that, "The schools that purposively do nothing tend to have a low racial/ethnic mix in their student population. The schools that have developed an explicit curriculum orientation tend to have a high racial/ethnic mix in their student population" (p.86).

The findings of Rosenberg and Simmon's (1991) and Fisher and Echols (1989) research are extremely important, as the educational system plays a significant role in childhood and adolescent identity development. Upon entering the school system, the child receives one of his or her earliest exposures to societal norms, values, restrictions, etc. Minority children may be acquainted with the dominant culture for the first time through the educational process. The experiences encountered in this system will have a major impact in the child's perceptions of self and society. The educational system has the very large responsibility of instilling a sense of personal self-worth, ethnic pride, and a willingness to be a productive member of society, in all students. However, to a great
extent the special needs of minority students have been neglected. According to hooks (1994), "...students from marginalized groups enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcome." (p. 84). And Cummins (1986) stated that "...students form 'dominated' societal groups are 'empowered' or 'disabled' as a direct result of their interaction with educators in the schools" (p. 21).

Minority students receive misinformation (if any information) about the contributions of their ethnic group to the history and progress of society. Curriculum is largely based on the values and experiences of members of the dominant ethnic group. Methods of assessment and evaluation are not likely to take ethnic differences into account. Educators are often ignorant of the unique characteristics and customs of the various minority ethnic groups. In addition, minority groups are extremely under-represented within the education profession (Banks, 1991, 1982; Banks and Grambs, 1972; Cummins, 1986; Gay, 1978; Harper, 1977; Luftig, 1983; MacCarthy, 1988, 1990). According to Banks (1981),

the Anglo-Centric curriculum negatively affects the ethnic child of color because he or she may find the school culture alien, hostile, and self-defeating. Most ethnic minority communities are characterized by some values, institutions, behavior patterns, and linguistic traits that differ in significant ways from those within the dominant society and in the schools. Because of the negative ways in which ethnic students and their cultures are often viewed by educators, many of them do not attain the skills they need to function successfully within the wider society (p.26).

Gay also states that the education system should be involved in helping the minority
adolescent to deal with his or her budding ethnic awareness by "increasing student understanding of the naturalness and complexity of development processes" (1978, p.653).

The research conducted in the field of ethnic/racial identity formation thus far has produced contradictory findings. Cross (Gay, 1985) described the childhood years as a period of ethnic innocence. Gay (1985) similarly contended that the childhood years comprise the preconceptual stage of ethnic identity. Conversely, it was the contention of Cohen and Manion (1983) that young children are aware of the value placed on their particular ethnic group in the larger society. They supported their contention by citing the study conducted by Milner in 1975 (Cohen and Manion, 1983, p. 81) which concluded that young children do have an accurate sense of ethnic identity. Spencer (1982) also noted minority children's preference for majority group values. This present study was conducted to further clarify some of the issues involved in the process of identity formation in visible minority youth.

Because of the demographic characteristics of the small black population in the lower mainland of British Columbia, the idea of consonant and dissonant social environments was important in this research. The specific focus of the research conducted will be elaborated in the chapters to follow.
CHAPTER TWO

Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods, Methodology, Researcher Limitations and Biases, and Research Questions

Chapter two will begin with a review of literature on qualitative and ethnographic methods. This will be followed by a presentation of the methodology used in this investigation. There will be a discussion of researcher beliefs, limitations, and biases, as well as a discussion of how these issues are dealt with in the research. And finally, the research questions of this investigation will be presented.

Qualitative and Ethnographic Research Methods

In this section, the research methods utilized within this investigation will be outlined. The particular focus will be a review of literature pertaining to philosophical considerations, and qualitative and ethnographic research methods, including conceptual frameworks and research questions. A presentation of the conceptual framework devised for this research will be included. The specific research question of this investigation will be presented in the final section of this chapter.

Philosophical Considerations

The importance of stating one's philosophical orientation at the onset of an investigation has been outlined by Goetz and Le Compte (1984). According to these authors, a researcher's philosophical orientation has an impact on every area of their research. "Any inquiry process—scientific or otherwise—occurs within the context of a researcher's personal experiences, general sociocultural frameworks, and philosophical traditions" (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984, p.33). My perspective is similar to the position of
'conceptual idealism' (Smith, 1983). A conceptual idealist believes that there is a reality that exists independently of the observer, however, our experience of reality is shaped by the perceptual filters of our minds. Perceptual filters are shaped by past experiences, beliefs, and values. Individuals within the same social and physical reality may interpret that reality in very different ways, due to differences in perceptual filters.

Qualitative & Ethnographic Research Methods

Rather than determining cause and effect relationships, the goal of qualitative research is the examination of the complex interrelationship of variables, in order to ascertain the patterns of interaction amongst them. It is important in qualitative research that the world view of the individuals investigated is accurately represented. Therefore, the researcher does not assume the role of 'expert' in the field of inquiry, rather, they attempt to learn about a social context from the experts—the individuals living the existence under investigation. From this perspective, the beliefs, values, and subjective experiences of the participants are extremely pertinent to the researcher's analysis of the phenomena. As much as possible, the researcher attempts to use the constructs of the participants to structure their analysis of the phenomena. In qualitative research the influence of the presence of the researcher on the participants and setting of the investigation is acknowledged. Researcher and participant interaction does affect the outcome of the study. In addition, it is recognized that the researcher's values and biases (his or her perceptual filters) will also influence the analysis and interpretation of the phenomena being investigated (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Smith, 1983).
According to Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative data is valuable for a number of reasons. It provides the researcher with detailed information about the phenomena under investigation. It focuses on the particular social context in which the phenomena is occurring. It can account for the historical progression of the phenomena. And, it often leads to unexpected or serendipitous findings. However, when undertaking qualitative research there must also be awareness of its limitations, which include: a lack of generalizability of findings from one social setting to other settings, the fact that researcher bias may have an impact on the outcome of the investigation, and, the use of selective sampling rather than random sampling. In addition, because qualitative research tends to be based on idiosyncratic methods of data analysis, it is difficult to replicate the investigations of other researchers. "We have few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 16). Therefore it is important that in qualitative research the methodology is very clearly outlined.

The research being undertaken can be even more specifically classified as being ethnographic in nature. Ethnographic research provides rich description of an identified group's experience. In this case the identified group is black youth, of Caribbean heritage, residing in British Columbia's lower mainland. The goal of ethnographic research is to capture the experiences of the group in such a way that the group's perspective or world view is presented. Again, in this holistic approach, it is the interrelationship of variables that is the focus of the investigation (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984).

Ethnographic design necessitates investigatory strategies conducive to cultural
reconstruction. The strategies are empirical and naturalistic. Participant and nonparticipant observation are used to acquire firsthand, sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real-world settings, and investigators take care to avoid purposive manipulation of variables in the study (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984).

My decision to focus on the use of qualitative and ethnographic research methods was influenced by many factors. The first influential factor is my philosophical position of conceptual idealism. The investigation I undertook sought to explore individuals' perceptions of their experiences in a particular social context. I do not believe that personal experience can be relayed from participant to researcher without it being first shaped by the participant's perceptual filter. In addition, it is my belief that the researcher can not record and analyze the data collected outside of his or her perceptual filter.

Secondly, I was attempting to investigate participants experiences in the context in which they naturally occur. I was interested in ascertaining the complex interrelationships between variables and the subtleties and nuances involved. I also wanted to be open to unexpected findings. It was not my goal to manipulate variables to determine cause and effect relationships.

I am convinced that the use of surveys rather than interviews would not have provided for the gathering of the extensive information which I sought. The interview method allowed the participants to reflect upon and articulate their experiences in an expanded way. Furthermore, this method was important for this group of participants as there are not many formal settings in their lives in which they can comfortably talk about their experiences. This fact was borne out in the interviews when some participants stated that
they were not given the opportunity to discuss these issues at school.

A qualitative research method which may also be useful in research of this nature is that of the grounded theory method (Rennie & Phillips, 1988). According to Rennie and Phillips (1988), "the emphasis in the grounded theory approach is on the generation of theory through the inductive examination of information. This emphasis is contrasted with the more traditional approach in sociology (and psychology) of using information to verify exiting theory " (p.141). Because of the inductive nature of this method, the review of relevant literature is delayed until after the research is undertaken, the data is systematically categorized, and theories are developed out of the patterns which have emerged in the categorization process.

This particular investigation was initiated in order to examine the applicability of existing models of racial/ethnic identity development, which were developed in other contexts, to the experiences of black youth, of Caribbean heritage, residing in this context. The investigation was based on a review of previous research in the area of racial/ethnic development in which key variables were identified. My aim was to ascertain to what degree these variables are viewed by participants as being relevant to their experiences. Therefore, the grounded theory approach was not utilized.

And finally, though the methods utilized in this investigation were mainly of a qualitative and ethnographic nature, frequency of participant responses are also noted in chapter three, in which data is analysed based on the construct coding system.

Conceptual Framework & Research Questions

Miles and Huberman (1984) described the conceptual framework of an ethnographic,
qualitative study as being "the current vision of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated" (p.33). They further stated that the conceptual framework is subject to revision as the investigation progresses and the pattern of relationships between variables become clearer.

At the onset of this research, the variables I was most interested in studying included:

- visible minority status;
- identity issues (self esteem, self awareness, locus of control);
- gender;
- coping strategies;
- support systems;
- consonant and dissonant racial environments; and,
- the degree of involvement of the individual in their racial/ethnic community.

The conceptual framework presented on the next page illustrates the hypothesized relationships between these variables. The arrows are used to indicate the possible connections between the variables.
Conceptual Framework #1

Visible
Minority Status

Identity
- self-concept
- self-esteem
- self-awareness
- locus of control

Coping Strategies
positive:
- asking for assistance from others (parents, peers, counselors, etc.)
- expression of feelings about issues
- investigating issues on own initiative and/or with the assistance of others

negative:
- isolation
- suppression of feelings in regards to racial issues
- depression

Consonant or Dissonant
Racial Environment
- racial mix of school and community population

Age
- childhood
- adolescence

Support Systems
- nuclear family
- extended family
- friends

Values Conflict Resolution
- majority group values vs. minority group value
Research questions develop out of the conceptual framework. Stating specific research questions at the beginning of an investigation assists the researcher in a number of ways. Research questions make explicit the theoretical premises upon which the researcher is operating. The variables which are to be the focus of the study are differentiated from others. Research questions also assist the researcher in sampling decisions about the subjects, the setting, and the issues of the investigation. In addition, the nature of research questions provide cues as to the sorts of research instruments that would be most effective in executing the research (Miles & Huberman, 1984). "The research questions make it easier for me to move from the conceptual framework to considerations about sampling, instrumentation, and eventual analysis, they operationalize the conceptual framework " (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 34).

Like conceptual frameworks, research questions are subject to modification and refocusing as the investigation proceeds. Some questions may become irrelevant. Other questions will be elaborated. And of course, new information is likely to generate different questions than originally anticipated. (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Methodology

In this section, the pilot study, selection of research sample, method, and data analysis will be discussed.

Pilot Study

In the spring of 1993, a pilot project was conducted with five participants (3 female, 2 male). The participants were chosen based on the same criteria to be used for participants
in the larger investigation. As stated previously, the purpose of the pilot was to test the utility of the interview questions, conceptual frameworks, and constructs to accurately capture the experiences of the participants.

The pilot study showed that the degree of detail provided by participants when responding to questions was sometimes determined by when the question was asked. For example, asking participants to describe their families and then to describe themselves yielded more detailed responses that asking participants to describe themselves first. At the time, I hypothesized that this finding may be because of the importance of the connection to the family unit. Perhaps, for black youth, it is difficult to describe themselves apart from their relationship to the family. Through this pilot, family relations were identified as a construct for examination in the larger investigation. The pilot results also influenced the order of question presentation in the interview guide.

Even in this very small sample size there appeared to be differing responses based on gender. For example, when asked if race was likely to have an effect on career opportunities as an adults, the three females said that it would, while the two males said that it would not. Also when asked what they really admired about their race, the females spoke about black history and culture, while the males focused on the fact that blacks excel in sports. This provided affirmation that gender is likely to be an important variable when examining the experiences of individuals.

The females all said that they would have to work harder than their white counterparts in order to achieve the same status. The males did not share these sentiments. The differences in responses led me to consider the importance of a minority adolescent's
perception of society, and their anticipation of societal barriers that may hinder their realization of their goals as an adult. Would this be a motivating force or would it give the individual a sense of hopelessness? In order to explore this question, the construct of locus of control was added.

Finally, based on the suggestion of a participant, two questions were added to the interview guide. They were: Do you feel differently when you're out with black peers verses white peers or peers of other races? and, How involved are you in the black community?

Sample

The selection of participants for this investigation was based on the following criteria:

- membership in the racial/ethnic minority group investigated (black youth of Caribbean heritage);

- born in Canada;

- age (13-18 years);

- gender (equal representation, 10 female, 10 male); and

- accessibility (permission from individuals and parents).

Participants were located through a number of means. Contact was initially made with black youth who were students at a local high school (Centennial Senior Secondary, in Coquitlam). These individuals agreed to participate in the study, with their parents' permission. Contacts were also made through members of a community track and field team, and two black community organizations. Participants and their parents also referred
this researcher to other youth and their families within their social circle who fit the
research criteria and might have some interest in participating. All of the participants
involved resided in Lower Mainland communities including Vancouver, Coquitlam, Port
Coquitlam, Surrey, Delta, Richmond, and Langley.

Participants were from middle-class family backgrounds as defined by parents' occupations. The fact that the participants were from middle-class socioeconomic status only, may be due to the self-selection rather than the random selection of participants. The relatively small sample size could also have been a contributing factor. Thus, results may contrast with work done by other black Canadian researchers who have focused on youth and families from working class families. For example Brand (1993) has written about the economic history of domestic labour in Toronto and the involvement of black women. And Dei (1996) has presented a study of the incidence of school drop out among working class black youth in Ontario.

The 1991 census identifies less than 1% of the population of the greater Vancouver Metropolitan area as having origins in the Caribbean and Bermuda. Out of a total population of 1.6 million, approximately 4000 people were born in the Caribbean and Bermuda areas. The students in this study were the children of immigrants, but they were not themselves immigrants. The reasons for imposing this criteria of non-immigrant on the sample selection are described in the section on research questions.

Method

The method used in this investigation was the interview. More specifically, I utilized the focused interview method incorporating . . . structured, semi-structured, and unstructured
questions (Merten & Kendall, 1946). In each case the interview setting was the family home of the participant. The interview was entered with a pre-established interview guide of the areas to be covered (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984). It was not my goal to ask the interview questions in the sequential fashion outlined in the guide, though often this did happen. Nor was it my goal to have the subjects explore only the areas outlined in the guide. I was cognizant of the importance of allowing participants the latitude to discuss issues relevant to themselves which may not have been outlined in the guide. However, the purpose of the guide was to ensure the consistent collection of data from participants in areas relevant to the investigation. Additionally, the interview guide was devised as a means of ascertaining whether or not the key variables identified in the literature review as being important factors in the process of identity development in black youth, were also identified by participants as being important variables. The interview guide is provided in Appendix A. Each interview averaged between one and two hours in length. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The tools utilized included; contact summary sheets, summary tables, coding systems, and causal networks (Miles and Huberman, 1984). After each interview was tape recorded, a contact summary sheet was used to note characteristics of the participant (age, gender, family background, etc.), characteristics of the setting (livingroom, kitchen, etc.), and items such as, which interview questions seemed most or least salient to the participant.

I also used a coding system that enabled me to reduce the data to a more manageable
form. The coding system used in this research was based on the constructs in my conceptual framework. This coding system was used as a tool while examining the interview notes. Sentences and phrases in which one or more of these constructs were evident, were marked with the relevant codes in the margins. The coding system in its entirety is presented below.

**Coding System**

acc= acceptance  
cop/str= coping strategies  
crc= connection to racial community  
cre+= consonant racial environment  
cre-= dissonant racial environment  
cul/con= cultural conflict  
fam/rel= family relationships  
fem/male= female/male (gender) relationships  
fg/e= future goals - careers  
fg/l= future goals - lifestyle  
int/rel+= = interracial relationships - positive views  
int/rel-= = interracial relationships - negative views  
isolation  
LOC= locus of control  
neg/est= negative self-esteem  
par/int= parental interaction  
pr/rel= peer relations  
pos/est= positive self-esteem  
ra/pri= racial pride  
rol/mod= role model  
sch/env= school environment  
sel/aw= self awareness  
ste= stereotyping  
su/sy= support system

Another useful tool was memoing (Miles and Huberman, 1984). While coding the field notes, ideas about construct-based codes and the relationships between them were immediately noted in the margins. These memos were later utilized in the exploration of
patterns of interrelationships between variables. For example, when participants made positive comments about people of other races when discussing peer relations and negative comments when discussing interracial dating and marriage these observations were memoed. Patterns were observed across participants. For example, gender-based differences in responses were memoed when observed.

In addition to the transcribed interview texts, the conceptually clustered matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1984) was the data display used in the investigation. An illustration of a portion of the conceptually clustered matrix which was used in this investigation is presented in Appendix B. The matrix developed is related to the conceptual framework and research questions of the investigation. The interview data was placed in the matrix as a phrase, sentence, or group of sentences that pertained to each of the variables identified in the conceptual framework. Some of the information related to more than one variable and was therefore recorded at various points on the matrix. Displaying the information in this fashion led to some understanding of the relationships between variables.

Miles and Huberman (1984) have suggested that a construct that they refer to as 'causal networks' are a useful means by which to hypothesis the relationship between variables and to begin to find explanations of emerging patterns. In this study, I utilized this construct as I attempted to present both my own conjectures as to the relationships between variables and the explanations presented by participants. However, while the construct is useful for this purpose, the term 'causal' may be misleading as it implies a unidirectional relationship. The term is inconsistent with notion that the goal of qualitative research is the examination of the complex interrelationship of variables. Therefore I will
use the term ‘network’ in reference to the construct which Miles and Huberman labelled ‘causal network’. Networks in this investigation are focused on the following questions:

- Which factors contribute to high/low self-esteem?
- How do the variables impact?
- Which variables are most significant?

**Example of a possible network:**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>negative cross-cultural interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racially consonant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Utilization of the methods outlined above has increased the likelihood of producing credible and replicable outcomes. I make particular reference to the use of explicit descriptions of research method and constructs, provision of display forms that are easily translated by others, and, statement of criterion rules for data entry.

**Researcher's Beliefs, Limitations, and Biases**

**Researcher's Beliefs**

It has been noted that there is often a lack of recognition of the black female experience in research literature (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; hooks, 1981; Butler, 1993). Hooks (1981) made the observation that when issues concerning blacks are discussed the focus tends to be on the black male experience. Likewise, when issues concerning women are discussed the focus tends to be on the experiences of white women. " No other group in
America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture" (hooks, 1981, p. 7).

Hooks (1994) also spoke to the importance of personal experience in shaping one's theories:

To me this (feminist) theory emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others...Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making (p. 70).

Therefore, I believe that as a black women it is important that I too acknowledge my experiences. These experiences led to the formation of my personal beliefs which have been very influential in shaping the direction of this research.

My experiences as a black woman growing up in Vancouver give me perspectives and ideas about the area of investigation. I present my views for the reader to consider. Making these views explicit should assist the reader in understanding and identifying researcher biases.

My interest in the topic of identity formation came about as a result of my own experience as a black Canadian. More specifically, my interest stems largely from personal challenges faced during my own childhood and adolescence after emigrating to Canada with my family at the age of five. I was very much aware of the search for identity that was taking place within myself. I am convinced that this heightened awareness was a
result of my status as a member of a racial minority group. Through discussion of this issue with others, I realized that this search for identity, and accompanying confusion, was a common theme among members of visible minority groups.

The investigation was guided by my personal belief that identity is concerned with self-acceptance and self-appreciation. Individuals internalize and reflect common views and values held within a society. Young members of this society learn that to be "Canadian" is to be white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, or as close an approximation as is possible. I also believe that many visible minority group members, in an attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture, experience a period in their development where they try to disassociate from their own culture—with minimal success, or they feel both frustration in the knowledge that they can not disassociate from their group, and guilt for wanting to do so.

It is my contention that the impact of attempts at racial assimilation can be overwhelming for children. Racial minority children, in this situation, are faced with attempting to become something they are not, namely white. And during this attempt the children are pressured to give up their own ethnic identity and cultural history. Even more disheartening is the observation that a minority child's willingness to conform to the dominant cultural identity does not guarantee that s/he will be accepted by the dominant racial group. The fact is, as much as the child succeeds in the transformation of his or her values, in terms of physical characteristics s/he continues to be a racial minority, and is likely to face prejudice and discrimination based on racial differences.

I disagree with suggestions that childhood is a period of "ethnic innocence" as put forward by some researchers (Cross cited in Gay, 1985). Young children may experience
feelings of inferiority, racial/ethnic isolation, and insensitivity on the part of others. Visible minority children realize that they are "different", and very quickly learn to equate different with inferior (Cohen & Manion, 1983; Spencer, 1982). And further, children who are members of the dominant group also recognize the differences between themselves and children who are members of visible minority groups. This awareness is sometimes the cause of negative behaviours targeting visible minority children. However, children have not yet acquired the conceptual tools to understand negative ethnic encounters in their totality. They can not comprehend the fact that they are victims of a societal system of dominant group and dependent groups. Visible minority children tend to take refuge in the comfort and acceptance of their family and ethnic community.

I also maintain that the promotion of the racial assimilation could lead to an environment that is detrimental to the psychological development of children of the dominant culture. An emphasis on the 'Anglo-culture' may lead Anglo children to become narrow-minded in their assessments of the value of other cultural orientations, in the society. They may believe that their cultural values are as relevant to all other children as they are to themselves. Furthermore, this sort of emphasis also distorts the relative importance of Anglo-culture in relation to other cultures on a world scale.

As we work towards achieving personal and Canadian identities, visible minorities face many barriers and challenges. These barriers are apparent not only to the members of visible minority group themselves, but also in the wider society. This assertion is supported by the fact that in federal and provincial legislation, one of the target groups identified for employment equity programs are visible minority groups. Additionally,
many public and private organizations are incorporating cultural competence and anti-racism training into employee training programs in order to increase sensitivity in a diverse workforce, and to provide racially and culturally sensitive service delivery to the public. For example in British Columbia, a provincial Multiculturalism Act has been in place since 1993. One of the major objectives of the act is the removal of barriers to full participation in society regardless or racial or cultural heritage.

**Researcher Limitations and Biases**

My limitations and biases are related to the fact that the area of investigation is of considerable personal significance. I am aware of the fact that past experience predisposes me to the belief that this is an area of difficulty for visible minority children, though this may not actually be the case in all instances. For example, because I was not born in Canada I may have faced issues of adjustment not faced by the youth in this study. I realize that there is the danger of interpreting the data gathered in a biased fashion, in an attempt to verify preconceived notions. I am also cognizant of the fact that the researcher-participant interaction does have an effect on the outcome of the investigation. The participants' responses to me, as a member of the same racial group, were probably different than they would have been were I a white researcher. It is likely that the differing response had a positive rather than a negative impact on the research. I believe that their was a great deal of openness and trust established between myself and the participants. Participants felt comfortable not only in responding to the questions posed but also in expanding on the responses and providing examples.

I am confident that my awareness of the impact of researcher bias and
researcher-participant interaction on the findings of the investigation have enabled me to produce a more accurate description and explanation of the phenomena investigated, as these factors have been accounted for. In addition, before undertaking this investigation, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of participants. The purpose in conducting the pilot study was to examine the effectiveness of the questions within the interview guide, and to ascertain whether or not the conceptual framework developed and the constructs identified by the researcher were confirmed by participant responses or if revisions were necessary to better reflect the reality of the identified group's experiences. Providing verbatim quotations from interviews with the young people in this study also allows the reader to determine, to some extent, whether my interpretations are consistent with the data. As a further balance to possible researcher bias, in drawing conclusions, I will rely not only on the results of this investigation but will also compare the results found here with the results of other studies in the area of identity formation in black youth.

**Research Questions**

The research questions in this study focus on the experiences of members of one ethnocultural/racial minority group rather than incorporating materials gleaned from several groups. The examination of the possible correlation of experiences across groups is of great importance, however, the inclusion of diverse racial and ethnic groups within this research would have increased the complexity of the interrelationships among variables. It is more difficult to note the interaction of variables such as language, religion, cultural traditions, and racial heritage when investigating the experiences of a number of
groups than when investigating the experiences of one group. McCarthy (1990) argues that when researching issues of race we must be careful to not conduct research which "ignores or flattens out the differences within minority groups while at the same time insulating the problems of racial inequality from issues of class and sexual oppression" (p. 118). An investigation of that magnitude is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore the focus of this investigation is the experiences of non-immigrant black youth of Caribbean heritage, residing in the greater Vancouver region.

Careful consideration was given to the question of whether or not new Canadian (first generation) youth should be included in the investigation. The inclusion of new Canadian youth would increase the difficulty in differentiating those experiences that are due to the process of adjustment in general from those experiences that are related to an individual's status as a visible minority. For example, in many instances, new Canadians face difficulties due to communication barriers. Though most Caribbean immigrants are English-speaking, they too may experience some communication difficulties because of different accents and dialects. In order to separate issues of adjustment from issues of visible minority status, (to whatever degree this is possible), adolescents born outside of Canada were not included in the study.

The general research question of this study was: What do the participants in this study perceive the nature of the relationships between their status as black adolescents in Canadian society, the processes of identity formation, and the development of self concept and self-esteem to be? Specifically, this investigation sought to answer the following questions:
1) What experiences occurring during the developmental years, and related to the racial/ethnic group membership of this group of black adolescents, could be said to characterize the group?

- What types of experiences are identified?
  (positive and/or negative)

- Is the impact of these experiences felt during childhood, adolescence, or both?

- What effect do these experiences have on the individual's developing self-concept and self-esteem?

2) What coping strategies does the individual use to deal with negative experiences based on racial heritage?

- Do individuals discuss issues with teachers/counsellors/parents/peers?

- What is the response from the individuals they confide in?

- How does the individual feel that others could be more helpful to them?

3) What effect, if any, does the racial mix of the immediate environment have on the individual's self-esteem and coping mechanisms?

The research questions were accompanied by the following hypothesis:

The development of self-concept and self-esteem is impacted by:

- the prejudice, discrimination, and negative stereotyping experienced by the individual;

- the coping strategies available to individuals that enable them to deal with prejudice, discrimination, and negative stereotyping;

- the availability of positive role models and a reference group of the same racial heritage; and,

- the ability of the minority group member to resolve, for herself or himself, the conflict between her or his group's values and the values of the dominant racial group.
CHAPTER THREE
Analysis of Interview Data

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part covers descriptive data including: age of participants, family composition, occupations of parents, dwelling types, and the geographical area in which participants reside. The second part analyses the interview data in relation to the concepts defined in the literature review.

Descriptive Data

Age of participants

Twenty individuals, ten male and ten female, between the ages of 13 and 18 years, were interviewed during this investigation. The age categorization by gender is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 yrs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 yrs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>All Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 yrs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Composition

Fifteen participants resided in dual parent homes, while 5 participants lived in a single parent home. The breakdown of the family composition by gender is reported in Table 3. The majority of participants also lived with other siblings. In some cases, there were other extended family members also residing in the home. Family configuration analysis is summarized on Table 4. The occupation of participants' parents is outlined on Table 5. It is interesting to note that most occupations are in the health care or social service field.

Based on the information gathered, the participants and their families in this study are of middle-class status. According to Persell (1993) middle-class characteristics include college educated parents, professional occupations, suburban lifestyles, and selective public schools or private schools for the children. Some or all of these characteristics are
evident in the socioeconomic situations of the majority of these participants' families.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY COMPOSITION BY GENDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dual Parent Home</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*(In this table participants are listed in the order that they were interviewed during the investigation.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY CONFIGURATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1(f) Angela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(f) Marcy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(f) Tina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4(m) Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19(m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20(m)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

( In order to maintain the anonymity of participants fictitious names have been assigned.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Rehabilitation Officer</td>
<td>Owns and Operates a Farm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy</td>
<td>Activity Worker</td>
<td>Recycling Plant Worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Dispatch Officer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Postal Service Employee</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Construction Worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Shoe Salesperson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zachary</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Insurance Broker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candace</td>
<td>Bike Shop Worker</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Vocational Instructor</td>
<td>Recycling Plant Worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsha</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricia</td>
<td>Health Care Worker</td>
<td>Manager of Nursing Home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>Psychiatric Nurse</td>
<td>Psychiatric Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Psychiatric Nurse</td>
<td>Psychiatric Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Sales Clerk - Clothing Store</td>
<td>Insurance Sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Sales Clerk - Clothing Store</td>
<td>Insurance Sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>Financial Advisor</td>
<td>Aircraft Mechanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Structural Engineer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Insurance Sales</td>
<td>Owns and Operates Bakery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants' Residences

The majority of participants lived in single family dwelling homes in suburban neighborhoods.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Dwelling Type</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Town House</th>
<th>Apartment</th>
<th>Basement Suite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location of Participants

The research participants represented areas throughout the lower mainland, though the majority resided in the Coquitlam and Surrey areas.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Area</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coquitlam</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langley</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Coquitlam</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schools Represented

Fifteen schools throughout the lower mainland were attended by the research participants. Twelve public high schools, 2 private high schools, and one community college were identified. The names of the schools are listed in appendix C.

Analysis by Construct Coding System

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the constructs of my conceptual framework as they were found to be at work in the lives of the participants. The presence of these constructs, and their degree of importance, was indicated in the participants' discussion of life experiences in the interview sessions. Data has been analysed on the basis of the construct coding system described in the data analysis section of chapter two. Each section in this chapter relates to one or more of the constructs and these are identified by the subsection headings. For example, the macro-environment section incorporates interracial relations and stereotyping. Also there is a section that examines both the constructs of isolation and acceptance.

As stated previously, the goal of this research was to examine the interrelationship of variables identified. The interview questions evoked a range of responses which could be related to a variety of key concepts identified in the literature review and considered key areas of investigation in this study. Transcript excerpts will be presented throughout this chapter to illustrate the construct section being discussed. These excerpts are sometimes illustrative of several constructs, however each excerpt will only be presented once. As
succeeding sections are presented, only new material will be highlighted.

In each section, a general overview of the frequency of construct identification will be presented, interspersed with interview excerpts, taken from the transcript verbatim, which illustrate the construct being discussed. Interview excerpts will be organized on the basis of age (from youngest to oldest) and gender (female responses then male responses), as much as possible. The reason for this organizational structure is that age and gender are two of the variables which I had hypothesized to impact the identity development of black youth. Additionally, as indicated in the literature review, identity development theorists also argue that age is an important factor (Erickson, 1968; Banks, 1981). Feminist scholars speak of the significance of gender in shaping an individual's experiences, and point out that often times in research, the female experience is not documented. (Bannerji, 1993; Belenky, 1986; Gilligan, 1983; hooks, 1981; Ng, Staton, Score, 1995). For example, Belenky (1986) who is involved in longitudinal interviews with university women on the development of self, voice, and mind, has noted that previous developmental research focused only on the experiences of male university students, and assumed that the findings were also applicable to females.

While conducting the interviews and reviewing the data it was found that in general the older participants, and in particular, the older female participants, responded to questions with much more detailed descriptions of their experiences than did younger participants. These detailed descriptions assisted in the illustration of key constructs to be presented. Therefore, many of the excerpts presented in this section are from the perspectives of the older, female, participants. However, in the process of data analysis the responses of all
participants were taken into account.

The transcript excerpts will be proceeded by the 'trigger' question. Most of the questions are based upon the interview guide, however some also came up spontaneously during interview sessions. It is also important to note that the transcript excerpts are not always direct responses to the questions identified, but they did emerge as a part of the discussion which grew out of the question presented.

The sections to be presented in the remainder of this chapter include:

- Racial Environment- Consonant or Dissonant?
- Connection to Racial/Cultural Community
- School Environment
- Macro-environment (cultural conflict, interracial interaction, stereotyping)
- Micro-environment (peer relations, dating and marriage)
- Gender Relations
- Family Relationships
- Parental Interaction
- Self-Awareness/Self-Concept
- Self-Esteem
- Role Models
- Cultural/Racial Pride
- Isolation/Acceptance
- Locus of Control
- Coping Strategies/Support Systems
- Future Goals (career and lifestyle)

The sections are presented in this sequence as I wish to focus first on the larger social environment in which the participants exist, including the general community, the black community, and the school system. I then move into an examination of participants more intimate social environment including family and friends. And finally, I explore the participants' concept of self and personal goals.
Racial Environment - Consonant or Dissonant?

The analysis begins with a consideration of consonant/dissonant racial environment because the influence of the racial/social context on the development of identity and self-concept is a central focus of this research. As discussed earlier, Rosenberg's and Simmon's (cited in Verna & Runion, 1985) research examined the consonant and dissonant social contexts in which visible minority youth are socialized. When a child's immediate environment is chiefly populated with members of their own racial group it is said to be a consonant social context. Conversely, when a child's immediate environment is chiefly populated with members of another racial group it is said to be a dissonant social context.

Every one of the 20 participants had experienced growing up within a racially dissonant environment both in terms of the community and the schools they had attended. The communities in which they lived had a majority white population. The schools were identified as either being majority white, majority Asian, or a mixture of white, Asian, South Asian, and other races. No participant had experienced a learning environment with a majority black population. Every participant had experienced being the only black student in a classroom. Several participants mentioned their experience as the only black student in a school, particularly at the elementary school level. Most participants reported that in the junior high school and high school years they met and befriended other black students, but their numbers still remained extremely small in comparison to the entire school population. Based on the participant's estimates, the black students at the schools previously identified, made up less than 1% of the total student populations.
Several questions evoked responses relevant to the notion of consonant and dissonant racial environments.

**Question:** How do you view the black community in the lower mainland?

**Angela - 17 years old**
With living in a community with mostly white people its...I've gotten used to it. I've always gone to a school with predominantly whites and done activities with me being the only black kid there. I don't really know, but I'd have a different kind of life I think, if I lived in a community with all black people...I think things would have been different, I mean if I lived back east or something. I don't know if I would have had the same opportunities I've had being in predominantly white schools. I think other black kids would have influenced me in a totally different way, depending on where I was living.

**David - 17 years old**
I wish I was in a neighbourhood with black people. I don't mean to be biased or anything but, um...I just wish I was living in a neighbourhood that was at least 50% black, you know...It gives you the feeling of...just like...family when they come around, you know....when we first arrived here, we moved here five years ago, there was all white kids and ah they were playing road hockey, which I played before I moved. And ... when I asked to play at first, they ignored me so I would just move. And I would presume it was because... I had just moved there and they didn't want me around so...It lasted for about a week until their parents invited mine over for tea, right. That's when it all started to change.

Most participants' involvement in a racially consonant environment is only within the family, both nuclear and extended, and at selected, infrequent events within the black community.

**Question:** What is your involvement with the black community?

**Tina - 14 years old**
Apart from my extended family, I'm not too involved with black people.

**Naomi - 18 years old**
S - ....when I went to other schools where the majority were white, and I had to get myself accustomed to them even though I didn't like it. But out of school I had my family. I had other black friends and...it didn't seem like a problem
I - Do you find a difference in that sort of a community than in a community where you're more mixed in with white people?

S - No, not really. You feel more comfortable because you see there's like people the same colour as you and they're the same race as you so you don't really feel bad.

A majority of participants spoke of their positive experience while visiting communities with large black populations, in eastern Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean.

Question: Have you spent time in a community where the majority of people were black?

Marsha - 16 years old
S - ....I would have more black people I guess, like people you know you can go out with, ....Like you can relate to them more easily and stuff. I don't find that there's a lot of black people here like, compared to New York....The first time I went to New York I was twelve. And I... just the whole....everywhere you looked it was black people, and I came...

I - How did it feel?

S - It was just so great, you know! And I came back....I couldn't even go out for two weeks. I wouldn't even leave the house. I just liked it so much. It was the best time of my life.

I - Yah? What was the difference?...

S - It's just like going into a store and seeing black people, black people everywhere, black products. And like...it would be like how white people see a few black people. I saw maybe.... four white people the whole time I was there. It felt good......It's nice. Everybody's black and I was just like "Wow!". When I was twelve, at first I didn't want to go to New York because I didn't think I'd enjoy it. I didn't want to come home! I begged my mom to send me back.

Dennis - 16 years old
S - Um...actually when we took a vacation to New York...like if that's what you mean, then in that case I have.

I - How did it feel?

S - Well....kind of weird actually. It felt kinda weird to come back to this lifestyle 'cause
um, you know, you’ll be looking around for black people and....

I - So you got used to seeing black people around you?
S - Yah, oh yah.

Though participants generally stated that they are used to, and relatively comfortable in, the school and community environment in which they are being raised, a majority of participants stated that they would like to see the black population in their area increase.

Connection to Racial/Cultural Community

Most participants expressed a desire to be more involved in activities taking place within the black community of the Lower Mainland. They particularly desire increased involvement with other black youth. Only two participants mentioned any active involvement with organized black community groups. Currently, the majority of the participants' interaction with the larger black community happen only on occasion, approximately three times a year when special events are staged. The events noted include the annual Junior Black Achievement Awards banquet, and Caribbean Days celebrations in the summertime. Other than these events, the participants' exposure to blacks outside of their extended family groups tend to be through contact with family friends.

Question: How do you view the black community in the lower mainland?

Tina – 14 years old
...basically in the area I grew up there's not a lot of black people around, like in Surrey or Whalley. They're all scattered all over the place, like in Vancouver and that....I think there needs to be more like...well we have the Caribbean picnic and all that stuff, right?....And a bunch of blacks get together at that, but... they don't have... certain community halls....like Indians have their temples and the Croatians or Yugoslavians, they have a special place. So I think the black community needs to get a place where just black people can hang out.
Angela - 17 years old
Uh, well, there isn't a lot of unity in the black community. Especially with West Indians. There's so many groups, the Trinidadians, the Grenadians, Jamaicans. Nobody wants to come together. Everybody wants to be the leader. No one wants to get together. That's why we don't have our own community centre yet.

Candace - 18 years old
...it's easy to not stick together here, because, I mean, you know you come up here, ah, you don't really have a community base. You know, like, we don't have eight black families living on one block. You know, we don't have black people owning the stores where we take our dollars and spend it in a black store, you know. It's like everything's so spread out.

Michael - 17 years old
Um...very scarce. It's not that strong as I wish it was. I wish it was a strong community because they you can...you feel a part of that community and you can work together. Um...really its very...its a very little community. It's presence is not that felt. I think other, um, other cultures don't feel there is a black community so to speak, you know. There's the...we all know there's the East Indian community...but we don't feel that black community' cause we all seem to be spread out all over....I don't know if there's much you can do about it, but um, I don't feel a sense of community really..

David - 17 years old
...my dad's cricket club is all black, the Carib club...I went to some of their cricket games....that's the only way I've really been in touch with all black people....I was at a black conference, I think it was called. It was at the Bayshore two years age, the ah...Black Achievements. There was just all blacks there. It was probably the first time I've ever spoken with black people. It was a really neat time. That, plus the cricket games at Stanley park.

Participants explained their lack of involvement in the black community as being based on the following factors; disunity within the black community, and, the fact that the small population of black people in the lower mainland do not live in close proximity to each other. Because groups of black people do not live in local neighbourhoods together it is difficult for black youth to get to know each other.

School Environment

The specific comments about school showed up in response to a wide variety of
questions. For example students were specifically asked about the inclusion of black
history in their school curriculum. More general questions such as - Do you recall a point
in your life when you started thinking about racial issues? - also evoked responses related
to school.

These responses are categorized into the following topics: general school climate,
teachers, counsellors, and curriculum.

**General School Climate**

**Question: How do you feel about yourself?**

*Tina* - 14 years old
Well, I like my school, my environment, and, I don't have many problems with any thing.
I get involved in my school. I like music, sports, all kind of stuff.

**Question: Do you recall a point in your life when you started thinking about racial
issues?**

*Marsha* - 16 years old
....You know like when you go to school they treat you differently because you're black.
You have to do better because your black.

*David* - 17 years old
S - ...ever since grade six. I ...had to face certain racial comments everyday at
school...just tried to ignore it...It's kind of hard to after hearing it every day, you know.
...there was a point...in this last year...when I just wanted to hit this guy 'cause he's been
bothering me since grade eight.

I - So it's still happening in your school environment?

S - It's still happening, yah. I just try to ignore it but it's kinda hard to just...constantly
everyday.

I - So what did you do with this guy that's been bothering you since grade eight?

S - Um I didn't...well...took his locker mirror. Pretty minor but, you know, I didn't want
to fight him or anything or risk being expelled so...I just try to walk away and talk to my
friends about it....

I - ...do you think that other students, other black students, at your school are experiencing the same stuff?

S - Yah...definitely, yah.

I - Do you ever talk about that?

S - ...yah. I don't know the grade eights or nines but seniors...the ones that have been around a few years, yah they'll talk about ...what they have to put up with, you know. It's a common thing and I guess you have to put up with it so...

Teachers

Though several participants attended schools with some visible minority teaching staff, only one participant had experienced attending a school at which a black teacher was employed. This participant stated that she felt extremely close to this teacher and turned to him for support during her high school years. Two other participants mentioned close relationships they had formed with white teachers and a coach. However, the majority of participants either stated that they did not develop significant relationships with teachers or administrators, or they gave examples of negative interaction.

Question: Do you remember being treated differently at all?

Carla - 14 years old

Well, one teacher tried to compare myself with them. I go "Well, that's not fair. She's like, " Well look it, I'm a little bit coloured." I'm like, "okay".... Well, I don't get it... She's like, " well, I have different races in me." But I go, " But you can't see it. You can see it on me. So people will look on me and say "She's coloured." right? But if you go past, they'll say you're white. So it doesn't really matter." She's like, " Well, oh I'm just tryin' to help here." It don't make no sense...Well she's pretty nice to me and she'd try to help, but then she'd always accuse me if something went missing out of her desk.

In relating her experiences with educators, 16 year old Marsha recounted two types of negative experiences she has encountered in the school system. The first experience
illustrated the teacher's misperceptions and stereotyped views of West Indian cultures. In
the second experience mentioned, Marsha described how administrators attempt to
dissuade groups of students of the same ethnic/racial minority backgrounds from
socializing together during their free time.

**Marsha - 16 years old**

S - I remember I had a teacher, and they were asking everybody where their parents were from. I told her my dad was from Barbados and she pointed it out on a map. And I said, "Well, oh yah, my mom's from Trinidad". And she said, "Oh yah, well, same place"....I was like, "No, it's not." I went to a catholic school and um she...There was me and there was another boy who was Indian who's parents were from Trinidad. And he said, "Well, do you think the pope will ever go to Trinidad?". And she was like, "No, the pope would never go to places like that." And like, maybe two or three years later the pope went there anyways...like, not necessarily with black people but, if like a group of people, like East Indians or whatever, are together they'll tell them to break up. But...

I - Who'll tell them that?

S - ...the vice principals and administration. But if its... white people they don't say anything... like last year I guess about five of us, five of us black girls...she came up and she's like, "Do you all go to school here?". We were like, "Yes, we do." right?

I - ...The principal was asking that?

S - Yah, the vice principal. And she was trying to be nice about it when she walked away. we go like "Yah, there's too many black people, huh?" But...they're just like that. They don't even try to play it off or anything.

I - So what happened when they told the Indo-Canadian students to break up?

S - They were like, "Why? We're not doing anything." They're like, "Oh, come on you're blocking the halls." I mean...hello, it was lunchtime. What? They can't hang around together?

Eighteen year old Nadia also related her encounters with stereotyping at school.

**Nadia - 18 years old**

.... a lot of times people will make the comment that, "You're good at sports." And I'll say, "Yah, but I'm good at English and Socials, and stuff, too." ...I don't sit back and let them make their comments without me making some back...It's good that the teachers
where I went were pretty easy going and by the time I graduated they knew I wasn't just another black athlete. They knew I had brains, you know...I'm different... it's tough just 'cause...at first when you're black, sometimes.

**Question:** Did you find that you related to any of the teachers differently?

**Candace - 18 years old**

The black teacher. I related really...he was there when I was about in grade ten, and I think he left in grade eleven. And ah...I related to him. And I think it was solely on the basis that he took an interest in my sister and I because we were two strong figures in the school and we were both black...And it was just cool having him around 'cause he was a black person. And then I guess it would be my basketball coach. He was a white man but he... I guess I had a special connection with him too.

**Question:** Do you remember being treated differently at all?

**Christopher - 17 years old**

You can't really make it...can't really make it on teams and stuff ....'cause at my school when you start trying out for the basketball team...a lot of the black guys there , it's like basketball is natural to them. They're real good but coach don't see that. When we play the way like when we're playing on the street and stuff he say " Oh, they're just trying to show off." And the blacks...they don't make it on the basketball team. The guys that don't have any skills whatsoever, they make it so the blacks look back and say, " Yah, what's up?"... Basically the school makes the same...stupid...it's just whack. I know teachers treat you different and stuff.

**Counsellors**

No participant mentioned having supportive relationships with school counsellors. In fact, many of them stated that they felt that their issues were not understood by counsellors. Additionally, when some students approached counsellors with negative experiences happening in the schools the counsellors would deny that students were experiencing racism. In general, participants were not confident that counsellors were genuinely concerned about their issues.

**Question:** Who would you consider to be your confidantes, people you confide in, when issues come up around being black or being a black female...in this society?
Naomi - 18 years old

... I don't feel comfortable going to a white guidance counsellor or something, because they would always try to change the subject or say "No it's not like that." you know? Because they are white and they're thinking that if they tell you something, then it seems as if they're putting themselves down so they wouldn't give you all the information you need, all the confidence, so....

Though by the junior high and high school years most participants had formed relationships with black students, they also retained peers of other races within their friendship circle. In fact, only three participants noted voluntary racial segregation amongst students at their schools.

Curriculum

In terms of curriculum, the majority of participants (13) stated that they had received no formal education in regard to the history of black people in Canada. A smaller proportion of participants (5) mentioned some discussion of the issue of black slavery. One participant mentioned that two teachers did include information on blacks in Canada to the class even though the subject was not a part of the formal curricula for the course. Another participant stated that her teacher had pointed her in the direction of a good information resource when asked. And, two participants mentioned that they took it upon their own initiative to research black history and experiences for their school projects.

The following three comments indicate concern about blacks being usually portrayed in relation to negative history and stereotyping.

Question: Are you taught about the history of Canadian blacks in school?

Marsha - 16 years old

The only time black people come up in school, every year, I swear...we'll be reading some book and the issue...."nigger" will come up, and they'll be calling....they think that it's so great that they're teaching something different about black people but in all those
situations the black person is a nigger. And its just like *To Kill A Mockingbird*, every book you read, the black person's the nigger, they're nothing else in the book but the nigger. I'm personally sick of that. And then they think they're doing so well teaching...like teaching something about black people when I don't find they are.... *To Kill A Mockingbird* was supposed to be such a good book but I was disgusted with it. Just because oh a few of the white people thought the black guy was right, when he was right. And they felt good when they justified him but you shouldn't feel good because you're supposed to justify him.

**Question:** Would you change anything about membership in your racial group if you could?

**Angela - 17 years old**

I enjoy being black. I enjoy the heritage too, that goes with it. But I wish there was more to it. Like in schools and on T.V..... that there would be more things about our heritage and that. Because, I know that the only time you hear about us is when they get into the slaves and then...I don't feel uncomfortable hearing about it because it's our past. It's not what we are right now. But I think that being the only black kid in a class when the teacher's talking about this, that they...they kinda look at you like you're gonna start crying or something 'cause they think that you're gonna be affected by what they're saying....they're stupid when it comes to that. They think that if they're talking about slaves or black people being killed and all this, that it's gonna affect you in a different way. And, the only time you hear about us again is around Martin Luther King, and all that. And that's it. That's the only time you hear about black people. And not Canadian black people either. I think Canadian kids know more about Martin Luther King than black kids down in America.

**Question:** Are you taught about the history of Canadian blacks in school?

**Nicholas - 16 years old**

S - ...not really. But I remember when we were studying about Vancouver and Vancouver Island that there was a paragraph in the textbook about how the black people from California came to Vancouver to get away from the oppression...That there were 44 of them and they did settle in Vancouver. That was like a paragraph of the book, and I thought that was pretty neat. Because that was... the first time I was seeing some black history. It did also mention that, I think it was James Douglas, he was the premier of the island or whatever, and he could have been also mixed, of mixed heritage. It did mention that...now that I'm getting older I'm beginning to realize that in school they don't teach you a lot about black people, or about like Africa and things like that. So I take it upon myself when we're given projects, and we're free to study...mythology,...instead of doing what everyone else does, like Greek mythology or Roman mythology,...why don't I choose like African mythology? And I did that...And people were interested. People thought..."Hey this is pretty neat". And people liked it better than hearing the same thing over and
over again...when I was acting...again we hear about... Steven Speilberg, and all the white people. We don't hear very much about ... Spike Lee,... black director...I look towards...to highlight a black person. To bring to people's attention that there are black people out there who are doing well, just as there are white people. We know about them. Well let's hear about the other people too, to bring up their side.

Overall, it appeared that much of the information gained by the participants from both school and media revolves around the black American experience, even though these students are Canadian of Caribbean heritage.

Research findings indicate that participants generally feel comfortable in their school environments. However, they do recognize that the system poses difficulties for them both in terms of racial discrimination and misrepresentations and under representations of their racial group within the school environment and in the curriculum. Additionally, most participants do not feel confident that school administration are sufficiently aware of their needs. Therefore they tend not to turn to school personnel for support.

**Macro-environment**

The construct of group interactions is being examined on four dimensions including:

- relationships between blacks and individuals of non-black, mainly white, cultural groups,
- relationships within the black community, between members of various black cultural groups,
- participants negative impressions of own racial/cultural community,
- stereotypes.

This section presents participants views on the interaction between racial/ethnic groups in Canadian society in general and in the local community. The sections to follow, look at
more intimate relationships between and within members of various groups.

Relationships Between Blacks and Individuals of Non-black Cultural Groups

Though intergroup relationships were generally positive, participants reported that the experience of cultural conflict in the form of racially discriminatory language and/or action, occurred most frequently in the elementary school years. The frequency of specific action targeted at individuals during the elementary school years appears to be quite small based on the reports of this sample group, as only four participants related specific incidents. Only one participant mentioned a specific racially motivated incident at the high school level, however, many participants noted experiencing more generalized racial tension between the various groups in the schools.

In terms of negative impressions of other cultural groups, negative comments about other cultural groups were quite infrequent however, three participants (1 male, 2 female) spoke negatively about the South Asian culture. Additionally, a few participants stated that it was their impression that white youth drink excessively.

Comments Regarding the Use of Racially Discriminatory Language

Question: Do you recall a point at which you started thinking about racial issues?

Carla - 14 years old

...there was like this half black and white kid and he'd...hang out with all these white guys and then he'd start calling me names. And I'd go, "Ain't you black too?". And then he'd walk away 'cause he knows what I'm talking about...they all called me browny and stuff but...I didn't really take it on. I just called them back names.

Question: Do you recall a point at which you started thinking about racial issues?

Trevor - 16 year old male

S - ...just about a year ago I had this experience with a couple of fellahs and it's not like...I've never had the experience before where they...where, you know, they're
calling...they're calling racial slurs and things like that. we were just... going down to the beach and...I could see a couple guys...ready to have a fight, and so I tried, I tried to stop it, and I kinda got in...I wasn't really supposed to take anybody's side but... I could see this guy was on this other guy...And I got in and I started protecting this guy and...

1 - So on one hand you were feeling it wasn't your fight, but on the other hand because it was a black person...

S - That I had to help him out...Yah. And then he turned against me and he started calling me all these different names and...

1 - The person you were trying to help?

S - No, no, the other guy that was... intimidating this....I can't really take that, right? I can only go so far. I just thought, "Oh, it's best to just leave it alone...", and,"What else are you gonna do?"...first of all it made me angry 'cause...I don't really think one person should be... putting down another race just because they're a different colour or they...have an accent or...That night I tried to figure out... why people do this kind of stuff.

Comments Regarding Views of Asian and South Asian Cultures

Question: How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?

Candace - 18 years old
.... in my school what I saw....now I'm not saying this always happened, but what I saw when I looked at the Asian students was that nobody was fighting back against the...you have to look at the different circumstances why we're here. I mean I'm not saying that Asian people are here by choice, because a lot of them, from what I understood, I mean in North America, came here because they were looking for a better way, and they got gyped as bad... I have had an Asian woman that I work with um, at (name of radio station), you know. We had a nice talk one day. She said how a lot of the them um...you know, these kids, these Asian students, they'll feel it. They'll feel it but they won't talk about it unless they feel in a safe environment to do so....Then again maybe it's easy for them to do that. Because they have their Asian community, right here, Chinatown....you have a place where you don't necessarily feel too threatened talking about this or that.

Question: Do you feel any differently when out with black people or black friends than when out with people of other racial groups?

Nadia - 18 years old
....I know when my East Indian friends, they take me to an East Indian function, I feel like just...you know, like a sore thumb. I just think like, "This is not where I'm supposed to
Only one participant articulated any concern or fear regarding organized racist groups in the community.

**Question:** What sort of things make you sad?

**Angela - 17 years old**
...maybe things like Klu Klux Klan. I think that's the one thing I'm really afraid of, you know. And all those white supremacist groups out there...They only see us for the skin colour and they still have these stereotypical views about us.

Another participant spoke eloquently to the issue of systemic racism.

**Question:** Would you change anything about membership in your racial group if you could?

**Candace - 18 years old**
I wouldn't want to be oppressing anybody....It's like, in a way I can see how white people can be so oblivious to the fact. It's like,"You don't have to see it, 'cause you're just sitting right up there. I'm the one sitting down here with my head in your ass." "..." I have to see it, you don't.",...And sometimes I wish I didn't have to...deal with it, just because its like...sitting here talking to you, I start crying. That's how strong it is for me... it just engulfs my whole being sometimes ....you know it's such a stress that I just try and look at them somewhat as people... because...it's like, they don't know. And it's not necessarily their fault...I mean when it comes down to it, who's telling them this stuff?  But they can believe it because it's working to their benefit so they don't have to see it any other way, you know. Whereas me, I have to see it another way because it's not working for my benefit, maybe if it was, I wouldn't see it either. .....Canada.. the racism is not the same as in the States, you know, not as blatant,...well not to black people. Native people might have something totally different to say because I would say that they're like the scapegoats of Canada...

A very small number of participants (2) admitted to having negative and sometimes discriminatory attitudes towards members of other racial groups, specifically, whites and Indo-Canadians.

**Question:** How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?
Tina - 14 years old
S...when I'm on the street, and you see an East Indian man I feel really uncomfortable around them...I feel uncomfortable with them because of their religion, their culture, and how they treat women. They treat them like dirt...and these past few weeks on the news they've been...the father, or the husband, killing the wife and...so I just don't particularly like that culture.

Question: How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?

Candace - 18 years old
...going to a party with those Asian kids, or East Indian kids, or Latin American kids and I don't feel like I fit in too well, but it's like something to learn. It's like, "They're doin' something different here." And it seems like they're all sort of doing this thing. They all know what they're doing. It's something that they all share... when I go into these parties with these white kids it's like, "You don't have any culture." And, it just seems like they don't have any culture so all they do is drink...it just becomes very destructive from what I see. Maybe its not. Maybe that is their culture.

Participants also spoke of situations where the youth do not harbour racist attitudes but their parents do.

Question: Do you think there's a difference in terms of the expectations of West Indian parents and the expectations of other parents of kids you know?

Angela - 17 years old
I've never been pressured into only talking to black kids. I have friends who went through that, whose parents would only let them talk to black kids, who wouldn't allow white children in the house, who wouldn't let them talk to white kids. And that really messed them up because they were making friends of different races but they couldn't invite them over. They couldn't let them call or anything....they hated their mother and father for that.

Relationships Within the Black Community

Participants also spoke to the issue of internalized racism within the black community.

They noted two specific types of occurrences. One issue is that of black people discriminating against each other based on skin colour. Darker complexioned individuals feel that they are sometimes discriminated against by individuals of lighter complexion.
The second issue raised was that of individuals feeling that some blacks will "sell out" other blacks in order to be accepted by white people.

**Question:** Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you dislike?

**Naomi - 18 years old**
...we're all black and some of them think they're white and you're not accepted because your skin is darker or you're not that light or something.

**Question:** What sort of things make you feel sad?

**Candace - 18 years old**
... when I hear black people talking bad about other black people from other areas like, "Oh those....those Caribbeans," or, "Oh those Africans"..." It's like, don't you know that that is a direct path that leads you right back to where you came from...?

**Participants' Negative Impressions of Own Racial/Cultural Community**

There were also some comments made by participants that indicated some negative perceptions of their own community. However, negative sentiments in regard to one's own cultural community were not commonly expressed by participants.

**Question:** Are there aspects of your racial or cultural heritage that you dislike?

**Tina - 14 years old**
I was born here and I know some of the customs of the Caribbean but...one thing that really bothers me is the way they talk. I don't like the way they talk.

**Stereotyping**

Though the subject of stereotyping was not specifically referred to in the interview guide, ten participants (3 female, 7 male) commented on stereotyping and its impact on their lives. It is important to include these because they relate to key issues regarding identity. Participants noted that often actions of individuals are used to judge the entire black race. Participants spoke of the stereotypes placed on them by other races, the
stereotypes they place on other races, and the stereotypes that blacks place on each other.

**Stereotypes Placed on Black by Others**

**Question:** *Is there anything you’re disappointed in, or don’t like about your race?*

**David - 17 years old**

... Just recently this girl in North Carolina who drowned her kids...the first thing she said was that it was a black man who did it, right? Then finally the truth came out... the Rodney King incident, when those guys were acquitted... it was obvious that those riots were going to happen, right? And they say that all blacks were looters, and all that stuff, “put them away,” and stuff like that....that’s just the thing...they start thinking that all blacks can be is this so and so criminal, looters... And they pick whites to be the stereotypical white person,... all good, doesn't do any...bad stuff, you know. Whereas we’re evil. That's confusing the whole thing.

**Question:** *What would you like to say about your experience as a black person growing up in the lower mainland?*

**Michael - 17 years old**

Well I find now as a teenager it’s very tough because with all the crime and the different things going on, minorities seem to get picked out a lot, and I find... as a young black male it's very hard to... live and not be again stereotyped as your typical black male, whatever typical is to other people. And I find that's a really...it's a really tough struggle....

**Stereotypes Placed on Others by Participants**

**Question:** *How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?*

**Angela - 17 years old**

I think maybe I still have stereotypical views of some of them. Not of my friends, ...other people of their same race....I don’t think I’m racist but I do say things that could be classified as racist... just driving on the road or something...” Oh no, that must be a Chinese driver driving in front of me,” you know?...No one really thinks about it when they say it to themselves or they say it out loud. I know I've heard my mom say it. I know I've heard everybody say it. Or um, "Look at all those Indians piled up in the car."... Just a whole bunch of things like that. I mean, I don't say it because I hate them...I just say it... I could never go out and say to somebody, "Oh I hate you because you're Chinese or East Indian ...I could never say that 'cause I would never want them to come up to me and say that....
Stereotypes Blacks Place on Each Other

Question: What do you think is the cause of some of the difficulties that black people face?

Christopher - 17 years old
...cause some of my friends...they're all players and stuff. Some girls say, "Oh he's black. All the black guys are all players." They see it like that. So I can understand that the black girls I was talkin' about would believe something like that, but...see we gotta ...eliminate that somehow. I don't know how but we got...with everybody, all blacks, 'cause that's like a weakening.

It was also noted by participants that lately, there seems to be a increase in 'reverse' or 'positive' stereotyping, in which youth of other races are attempting to emulate the behaviours, dress, music, and speech patterns of black youth.

Question: Do you think that your racial or ethnic background makes a difference in your relationship to other people?

Marcy - 15 years old
Like before they just...they tried to fit us in with their group, in like elementary school. But now...it must be... a phase or something, but it seems as though more people want to be black.

Christopher - 17 years old
...now people try to belong with us, not us trying to belong with them....You got more Caucasians dressing like the blacks, tryin' to talk like the blacks, sing like the blacks. While we're just basically doin' what we do.

In the discussions around issues of stereotyping a primary message from participants was that they felt a great deal of personal responsibility to present their race positively and not feed into the negative stereotypes that prevail in regard to black people. Some participants stated that this sense of responsibility is quite burdensome.

Question: What would you like to say about your experience as a black person growing up in the lower mainland?
Michael - 17 years old

S - I don't think I have to go out and prove people wrong but yet I don't want to give people the wrong sense. I think that showing...that we are not a people that...makes trouble like some people think...I think that we as a people should...stick together more...I think we can do anything really. And people will see that togetherness. Once they see togetherness they don't seem to be able to distinguish all these separate little individuals and make these generalizations.

I - It sounds like you feel a lot of responsibility...to the reputation of not only yourself individually, but to the black race.

S - Yah I do...and it shouldn't be that way...but yet I know...I'm going to do my part...The littlest thing I do can leave an impression on people that they'll make a total generalization to everyone else and if I can just do my part on separate individuals, separate people, then I'm fine....I do feel a responsibility, just the same as my own personal responsibility.

There may be a relationship between the stereotyping of black people that participants speak of and their statements that they often find it difficult to develop friendships with other black youth. Stereotypes may be internalized by the youth. So instead of approaching other youth on the basis of their individual personalities, they hesitate because of their fear that they will be perceived as "too black" or "too white" in their attitudes. This may serve to create barriers to intragroup interaction.

Micro-environment

While the construct of macro-environment sought to examine participants' views of the relationships between various cultural/racial groups in general, the construct of micro-environment was explored with the goal of ascertaining the participants' personal interactions and levels of intimacy with individuals of the same and differing racial and cultural heritages. Issues examined included attitudes towards friendships, dating, and marriage—both interracial and intraracial.
Friendships

The peer relationships in participants' lives were examined from the perspectives of the significance of the racial identification of close friends to the individuals and the differences in comfort level experienced by participants when interacting with friends of different racial/cultural heritages. Participants also commented on the types of activities engaged in by friends.

Most participants reported that their friendship group included people of many cultural heritages. It should be noted however that 'friendship' in this context seems to have been interpreted very generously and includes individuals that participants may more accurately refer to as acquaintances.

The majority of the participants (7-male, 6-female) stated that they had friends of other racial heritages. Almost half of the participants (8) stated that all of their closest friends are black. Five participants had primarily white friends, while two had mainly friends of South Asian heritage. Angela, for example, has had primarily white friends since childhood.

**Question: How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?**

**Angela - 17 years old**

...in kindergarten, my best friend, she's white, and she went home, ...the second day of kindergarten, she went home, and she said to her mom, "I met this girl," right, "I met this girl, and she's really tall, and she's really nice." And her mom said, "Oh, I'm gonna have to meet her tomorrow." Then she saw me, and I was a black kid. And it was really funny because its the most obvious thing that I was black but she didn't even say one word about it. She didn't even see me as a different person. She just saw me as another kid.

**Question: How would you describe your friends?**

**Angela - 17 years old**

My friends...mostly all white...The white kids, they do a lot...they do different activities than the black kids...a lot of the white kids are...jocks. You know they're the rugby, football type, you know. They drink a lot, and like to stay out a lot, and all that...
on a lot of materialistic things. I notice that a lot of the black kids, they just like being with their friends. They don’t need alcohol. They don’t need anything...They like to have a good time. And I like to have a good time without alcohol and all that too...But with white kids,... you always have to have "fun." You always have to have alcohol.

When asked if they felt that race was a determining factor in how non-black individuals interacted with or reacted to them, six participants (4-male, 2-female) stated that they feel it is an issue, while four participants (3-male, 1-female) stated that it is not an issue. Others were undecided.

**Question: How would you describe your friends?**

**Naomi - 18 years old**
... the white people don’t really...they don’t feel like if they mix in with us. So they just leave us alone and we leave them alone... I feel weird when I’m with them.

**Question: Do you feel differences when you’re out with or around black people than when out with or around people of other races?**

**Noah - 15 years old**
Ah...not really, no. I don’t think so. It’s all the same to me, I think. I don’t really feel that much different, no, ’cause I’m more used to being around people of different races than with people that are of the same race as me...

**Question: Do you feel differently when you’re out with black friends versus when you’re out with your friends of other backgrounds?**

**Nicholas - 16 years old**
..well sometimes when I’m with ...white friends, they try not to say things that will offend you, like say like racial jokes....Or they ask me if it’s alright. And sometimes I say it’s alright, it doesn’t bother me. And it doesn’t bother me, but I think they shouldn’t say it at all. But when I’m with my black friends they do the exact same thing. Always like, putting down white people and...and um sometimes I do that too, but I know it’s not right.

**Question: How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?**

**Nicholas - 16 years old**
I try to look at a person for what they are. And if they’re not a good person I don’t like, hang around with them...I haven’t had any, a lot of...racism or prejudice. Everyone’s treated me as an equal, and sometimes better than the next white person, just because of
who I am, and not because that I'm black.

Question: Do you think your racial or ethnic background makes a difference in how you relate to other people or how they relate to you?

David - 17 years old
S - ...we were at a B.C. Lions game and we were looking around at pictures, some artists selling...There was a picture of O.J. Simpson,... one of my friends said ah, "Hey (name), are you going to buy this picture?". Stuff like that...kinda makes you pissed off...if we see a black girl in the mall they'll say, "Hey (name), there's a girl for ya." ...I just get pissed, but basically that's it.

I - Do you ever say anything to them?

S - No, no....I probably should but ...I don't...I just don't want to be a sore thumb or what ever...I guess if it pisses me off I should say something.

Dating & Marriage

The majority of the participants (8-male, 8-female) expressed having no difficulty with the notion of interracial dating and marriage should the situation present itself, though many expressed a preference of dating and marrying within their own racial group. For example, two of the male participants stated that they do date interracially but intend to marry black women. Six female participants stated that they would prefer to marry black men but do not rule out marriage to men of different racial heritages. One participant was quite certain that she will only marry a black man.

Question: What do you think of the idea of interracial marriage?

Carla - 14 years old
Well...I guess it's okay. I mean, if you love the person it's fine. If you're just gonna marry, like say, a black lady marries a white man 'cause she doesn't want her kids to be like full black or something, I mean that wouldn't be the right to do. But I mean, if there's love in the relationship that's fine.
Marsha - 16 years old
I like my Caribbean heritage. I like the music, the whole culture and everything. I don’t think I’d marry outside of it....I’d like to marry somebody who has a West Indian background. I like going out and I’d like somebody who can relate to me and stuff....I don’t think I could relate to anybody who isn’t in my race. Maybe I would date them, but I can’t see a deep, like...intimate relationship. I just... don’t think it would work out, you know?

Angela - 17 years old
I can see myself marrying anybody. Not anybody, but I mean anybody of a different racial background.....if you’re in the situation where you worry about “Oh no, what are my white friends going to think about me?” Because a lot of them think that if you’re a black person, they think you should stay with someone who’s black. And what are my black friends going to think when they see me with a white guy? Um, but I think that’s ... in the very back of my mind. The main thing is to find someone that I like and that likes me back, for who I am. And in my mind, that’s fine then, ’cause that’s the most important part.

Michael - 17 years old
I think it’s...it’s really a challenge for the two people who are married....Colour is not a boundary for marriage and for love so I think its perfectly...perfectly fine...again I think it’s a challenge because you’re gonna go through hardships . You’re gonna have to deal with certain problems on both sides.... if the person is strong enough, and the love is strong enough, I think, you know, go for it ...if someone is there and that’s the right person, I won’t pass them up just because it’s gonna be tough, just ’cause they're a different colour....If the right person comes I don't care if they're purple.

A few participants also alluded to their parents’ views of interracial dating and marriage and it's impact on the participant's choices.

Question: What do you think of the idea of ....erracial dating and marriage?

Naomi - 18 years old
I know my dad would accept it... if I brought home a white boyfriend or something. He would accept it because he doesn’t look at the colour...he looks at the person as what he it... if he’s not good for me he wouldn’t say " Oh, it's because of his colour that I don't want you being with him but because he doesn't have any education.", or if he doesn’t have a good status in his life or something, you know? That's what my dad would look for. But my mom's sort of like the person that she'd look at colour in a way. But for my brothers, she wouldn't say as much 'cause she thinks that they're boys and...boys will be boys all the time, and it doesn't really matter....but for us, her girls, she would say that we'd have to stick to her race....
David - 17 years old
...my parents words are... "Marry a black girl. Keep the race." and everything else... I'd like to marry a black girl. Not that I'd be biased against one of the others. But ah...I'd rather...to marry someone who is black.

Five participants (1-male, 4-female) voiced their concern in regards to the difficulties often faced by the children of interracial marriages.

Question: What do you think about the idea of interracial dating and marriage?

Marsha - 16 years old
Well, if somebody wants to marry interracially that's fine but, but I personally don't think that I would do it. 'Cause you know, your kids might have problems. They don't fit into the black or white community. I don't really want to raise somebody so they have to go through...I know they'll have to go through so many problems. I just don't think it's a good idea.

Candace - 18 years old
.....Personally I'm not a big agreer on mixed relationships, and yet here I am in one .....but I also feel that I have a priority for my race. I want to see us carry on as black people. I don't want to see a whole bunch of.. mixed race kids who are confused...Because when my half breed kids go off and marry non-white people, then what? You know, its just starting...the liquid...the, the melt down of black people....sometimes I just say that I don't want to be responsible for that.

Most participants appear to be accepting of the notion of interracial dating and marriage in general, though many indicated a personal preference for marrying within their own racial group. It was also pointed out by a couple of participants that dating decisions are dependent on the choices available within the environment. As some participants did not have contact with other black peers, the real choice for them was between interracial dating and not dating at all.

Of those participants who stated a preference to marry within their own racial group, the majority were female. One of the factors that seems to influence this preference was
the anticipated difficulties that their biracial children would face.

**Gender Relations**

The issue of gender relations in the black community was commented on by eleven participants (7 female, 4 male). Participants discussed the negative gender stereotypes specific to black males and females that they hear.

**Question: How would you describe yourself?**

**Candace - 18 years old**

_I have a very strong personality. I'm strong headed, stubborn even sometimes but oh well, you gotta be that way sometimes, especially as a black woman, I think. You've got to be stubborn because people can tell you...will try and tell you what to do, because they think you're easily manipulated, you have a weak mind, stereotypes like that._

For the female respondents the major issue cited was the limited availability of black males as dating partners. In addition to there being a small number of young black males in the community, many black males seem to prefer dating white females or females of other races than dating black females.

**Question: Does race play any part in the choices or availability of dating partners?**

**Marsha - 16 years old**

_1 - So seeing that we're in a community where there aren't piles and piles of black people, that could make it kind of frustrating._

_S - That's why I want to go. I need to leave. I'd like to go somewhere where there's black people, where I could really relate...I just...I don't like the guys around here. They're not really nice... they'll see you, they'll be with white girls, and they'll give you a bad look or something. And I'm like, "I don't care." you know? "I'm not looking at you, or anything."..._

_1 - So how do you feel when you see that, like, black guys dating white girls?_

_S - At first I was really disgusted right. But then I don't really care, cause they have a right to date who they want, right? So that's not my problem._
Question: What do you think of the idea of interracial marriage?

Angela - 17 years old
S - I always used to say "You never see a black man with a black woman". That made me mad because there's all these black women out there who are single...I guess these black guys know that...the black women are too strong to take any of the crap that they probably dish out.... I'd like to get involved with someone of the same race, a black guy. But a lot of them that grow up here are really messed up. ...they don't know how to treat women or something...

1 - Do you think it's more difficult to date or to find dating partners as a black female?
S - I think it is for a black female. I think it's harder to find someone of the black race.

Question: Do you find a difference in that sort of a community [predominantly black] than in a community where you're more mixed with white people?

Naomi - 18 years old
But when there's like a mix there's jealousy going on...some black folk feel like if a white girl's with a black guy, "Oh no, they're taking my man." or something, "'cause he's my black man." you know? So then there'll be fights with black girls and white girls. And then the white girls will be all scared....Then there's the black guys with the black girls thinking that the black girls would be with white guys. So I don't think there'd be like a mix. Everybody always had their little fight.

Male respondents noted that some black females "have an attitude," or act in a very judgemental way towards the male, which inhibits their desire to approach black females.

There was also concern expressed that some white females date them because they enjoy the novelty of dating a black man, not because they are genuinely interested in the person that they are with.

Michael - 17 years old
That affects me a little bit because I sometimes...I'll be dating a person and they'll be dating me because I'm black, whatever goes with the status of dating a black guy.

Christopher - 17 years old
...It's nothing against like, black women or nothing. It's just...for the ones I know downtown, they all got a certain attitude towards them...The majority of them play like
they're all that, right...I just go, "You might as well just start lookin' at personality and see if there's a difference."

1 - ... you're thinking maybe there's differences between the personalities of black women and white women?

S - If I was to get married it would be a black woman, right, but I'm just saying...the difference is...oh..black women...They follow...basically the crowd. So if...one of her friends didn't like you, and they were talkin' negative about you, she'd believe the friend before she'd believe you, right?.... but with...not really Caucasians but with anybody else It'd be like they'd believe you over whatever.

The notion that black males tend to more readily date females of other races than black females caused a degree of frustration black females. It impacts their sense of acceptance by black males, while at the same time they appear to be less inclined to date interracially than their male counterparts. On the other hand, black males have indicated that they find the assertive or judgemental attitudes of some black women unappealing.

Larger societal factors also influenced the intimate relationships of black females and males, as well as their intimate relationship with females and males of other racial groups. For example, the black male image in the media of athletes and entertainers tended to be attractive to females of all racial groups. However, until very recently the only images of female beauty have been that of the white female. Males of every racial group within this society would be influenced by this image as the beauty standard. So, not only would the black female encounter competition from females of other racial groups in finding black male partners, they are also less likely to attract males of other racial groups (Butler, 1993; hooks, 1981)

Family Relationships

Most participants spoke very positively of their immediate family environments.
Families were identified as being an ongoing source of support in their lives.

**Question: How would you describe your family?**

**Nicholas - 16 years old**
...we're a close family. We like to do family activities together. We try to... cooperate and work together, but sometimes we have our problems like everybody else. But overall we're a good family.

**David - 17 years old**
...well we're better than most families I've seen. In some there's mostly fighting.... but this one...it's a great family. We've adopted a little one four years ago, and that's just changed the makeup of the family. It's great.

A majority of participants spoke to the issue of the role of extended family in their lives.

When comparing those participants who felt close to extended family members to those participants who reported that they are not closely bonded with extended family members, the numbers in the two groups are fairly close. Eight participants reported having a close relationship while six participants reported that they are not close. The pattern of response appears to be correlated with the gender of the respondent. Of the eight participants who stated that they are close to extended family members six were female. Of the six participants who stated that they were not close to extended family members five were male.

**Question: Do you have a large extended family?**

**Angela - 17 years old**
We're a close knit family, always doing family activities, always eating at each other's houses and all that.

**Question: How would you describe your family?**

**Naomi - 18 years old**
Very big...lots of kids....I can only tell you about my mother's family because my dad's family is back home....my mother's family is sort of like...we're all together ...the normal
family would be, grandchildren, great grandchildren, older brothers and sisters and normal stuff like that.

Participants stressed the importance of the family environment as being the place in which they feel most comfortable in exploring issues of racial/cultural identity. In terms of support within the family, most participants felt closer to their mothers (6 female, 3 male) than to their fathers (2 female, 2 male). Some participants stated that they felt closest to siblings or extended family members (2 female, 5 male).

**Parental Interaction**

Fifteen of the twenty participants lived in a dual parent home. The five participants living in single parent homes were all female. Of the group of five female participants, three live with their mothers while two lived with their fathers. When asked, most participants expressed feeling supported by their parents in their daily lives. For example:

**Question:** What's your relationship like with your parents?

**Angela - 17 years old**

I - How about your mother?

S - We have a good relationship. We talk about a lot of things. Like we are open with each other. I spend a lot of time with her. We're just...we're friends. But we still do argue but it's about really petty things...I feel really comfortable talking to my mom about almost everything...I've had some special times with my dad too, but seeing my mom every day, and knowing her, knowing everything about her, I know her a lot better than my dad.

**Dennis - 16 years old**

Whenever we have any problems we tell each other like where we're at exactly. We give each other advice and help and...do the best we can for each other.

**Michael - 17 years old**

...my parents are keen on discipline and good conduct,...they're very loving and supportive with what we do.
David - 17 years old
...when I've had a bad grade at school mom usually freaks out but dad, he usually understands. Just like you know, "Work harder, and then you'll get the A or the B." He has his times when he says, "You blew your chances."...my dad usually just gives me a chance...He's pretty understanding.

Fourteen participants stated their view that their parents place a lot of expectations on them, especially in terms of educational pursuits and future endeavors. This view was equally expressed by male and female participants.

Question: Do you feel that your parents place a lot of expectations on you?

Monica - 14 years old
...they kinda expect you to do your best, I guess what every parent wants. Sometimes it can be more than what you think you can do.

Angela - 17 years old
Yah...um, expectations to do well in school...that's a big expectation, at least from my dad.

Naomi - 18 years old
...he's expecting me to finish school and to have a better life than...better than what he had.

Candace - 18 years old
...coming from a country where there's a lot of poverty I guess, and not necessarily too much opportunity. He wants to see his daughters, especially his black daughters, get ahead in this world...so...he would have a lot of expectations. I'm sure he would like doctors and lawyers as daughters. But at the same time as long as he sees that we're thinking that's his main expectation,...is that we, we don't just become stupid...imbeciles, you know, stop thinking, stop using our minds, stop inquiring. So I think that is the main expectation from him. Although he would like to see us achieve these high standards in this society...and my mom...she just wants us to be happy but...not lose track of whatever focus we have...Whether its to be the best, I don't know,...garbage dispenser person...whatever it is.

Five male participants expressed the view that their parents placed greater expectations on them than the expectations that the parents of friends placed on their friends. This view was not echoed by female participants.
Question: How about when you compare your parents' expectations with the expectations of your friends' parents. Are they the same?

Zachary - 16 years old
Well some parents...they don't really look into their kids as much. They're not really as understanding or ...I guess...as interested in how their kids do.

Michael - 17 years old
No. A lot different. My friends seem to get away with...mediacracy and with the normal, Mickey Mouse, slip,...but my parents don’t accept that...Sometimes I get frustrated with that.....That does bother me sometimes because...how come my friends can do this and I can't. And they'll always use, "You're not your friends and we're not your friends' parents."

Christopher - 17 years old
...most of my black friends...their parents have the same expectations, but other than that, everybody else, they've got it a bit lighter...

It was quite apparent that high parental expectations were a primary motivating factor in participants' lives. However, rather than causing resentment, most participants felt that they were more than capable of meeting the challenge. They were encouraged by the fact that their parents took a keen interest in their lives. They believe that often times their white friends' parents did not show the same degree of interest as that exhibited by their own parents.

Self-Awareness/Self-Concept

Earlier in this discussion, self-concept was described as being the definition or picture of self that one holds. It was stated that descriptions of self are inclusive of one's physical characteristics, personality traits, and attitudes. Further, self-concept includes the inner view that an individual has of his or her personality. For the purpose of this study the terms self-concept and self-awareness have been used interchangeably.

In the examination of participants' self-awareness, the areas of general self-perception,
and cultural/racial awareness were explored. The main question used to gather information in regard to the participants' self-perceptions was—How would you describe yourself? The descriptors used are listed below.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easily motivated</td>
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<tr>
<td>easily distracted</td>
<td>1 f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>2 f</td>
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<tr>
<td>shy</td>
<td>3 f, 1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambitious</td>
<td>1 f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggressive</td>
<td>1 f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard working</td>
<td>1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leader/in control</td>
<td>1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of humour</td>
<td>1 f, 3 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast learner</td>
<td>1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy to get along with</td>
<td>1 f, 5 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outgoing</td>
<td>4 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>2 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarcastic</td>
<td>1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nice/good person</td>
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In terms of a cultural/racial self-awareness, though some participants (3 f, 1 m) stated that they had always been aware of racial issues, the majority of respondents stated...
that they started to consciously think about racial issues when in elementary school (5 female, 3 male) and junior high school (3 female, 2 male). Two participants (1 female, 1 male) stated that they started consciously thinking about racial issues in high school. Three participants (1 female, 2 male) reported that they do not think about these issues. Two participants (1 female, one male) stated that they have never experienced prejudice or racism.

**Question:** Do you recall a point in time when you started thinking about racial issues?

**Candace - 18 years old**

It's always been something that I was aware of to some degree. Between the ages of maybe 13 and 15, I was going through a phase where I was a little uncomfortable with myself. It wasn't even that I was necessarily uncomfortable but it was just like, "Okay, where do I fit in here?"...when it really began to hit me was grade 11. That's when I started having a really rough time in school. 'Cause it was like all of a sudden you know, I was picking my courses..., and I was noticing, "Where are the black people?"... "I know we're here somewhere."

**Nicholas - 16 years old**

S - It's not been...to the forefront of my mind. Maybe when I started high school. When things come up in class and we talk about racial issues.

I - Do you think that your race, or ethnic background makes a difference in how you relate to other people and how they relate to you?

S - I think so because you have your own experiences and the experiences of your family. They tell you about your heritage. And that sort of sometimes, subconsciously, influences your decisions. And they you bring your experiences and your thoughts to other people and... show them your ideas. And they do the same thing, too.

Some of the respondents noted that even though it was in junior high school that they began to explore issues of racial identity, much of their thought focused on incidents which had occurred in elementary school. While in elementary school, they did not understand how the dynamics of racial discrimination and stereotyping were involved in
the negative situations they were dealing with. More female participants reported incidents of being targeted by race based teasing and harassment while in elementary school than did males.

**Question:** Do you recall a point in your life when you started thinking about racial issues?

**Carla - 14 years old**
S - Well people used to call me names so my grades were dropping or stayed low I guess. but then...somehow I got used to it and then they just stopped.

I - So all the way from kindergarten ...and you remember some of the stuff?

S - Yah.

**Marsha - 16 years old**
... I was the only black student, right? In elementary school, especially. But I didn't really see it 'til after...I was older and looked back at some of the things...that I saw things...

**Nadia - 18 years old**
There was probably two main ones (times she thought about racial issues). One was about grade two or grade three. It wasn't like a big thing. I just knew I was different... then I thought, "If I'm different, I'm not different in a bad way, I'm unique." That made me better, basically, because I don't fall in. I mean, you could always pick me out in the school picture. I felt special... at school there was a little racial tension but...I never felt any really directed towards me...

**Noah - 15 years old**
I probably started thinking about it pretty young...'cause I was usually the only black person in my class...I was around nine years old or something like that... at first...you feel kind of weird but then I got used to it. I thought it was just a normal way of life I guess.

Some participants also discussed how they felt their interest in racial issues or black cultural experience was triggered. Of those who raised the issue, twice as many pointed to external triggers (2 female, 4 male) than pointed to internal triggers (1 female, 2 male).

Those participants who reported that their interest was triggered by internal factors
stated that they recognized the dearth of black cultural experience around them to draw on, being the only black student in their school or classroom. They started to focus on black issues when they did appear in the media, and they began to actively search out music and literature which was reflective of the black experience.

**Question: What kind of things did you start thinking about?**

**Tina - 14 years old**

...I seemed to...watch a lot more things that are just black oriented...I seem to enjoy black shows better than white shows...

Six participants' (2 female, 4 male) interest was externally triggered by racially based negative experiences or by the positive experience of coming into contact with other black youth in the junior and/or senior high school years. Contact with increasing numbers of black youth occurred as students filtered from the elementary schools to the junior high schools, and from the junior high schools to the high schools.

**Question: Do you recall a point in your life when you started thinking about racial issues?**

**Ian - 13 years old**

Probably when that um, Malcolm X movie came out. And I saw it...I saw how the black people were treated...I began to think about it, but then...I've stopped now.

**Michael - 17 years old**

Ah...It probably began...in early junior high. It was very minimal, but I could begin to see the differences. During elementary...I was basically the only black in the school, and so racial...I didn't really grow up with that...awareness. And the people around in my environment wasn't there...that I could be aware of racially what I am...until about grade 8, grade 9 and there's more coming in from different schools, and then you start to relate...When I was in grade 10 I started to become really racially aware.

In terms of general self-perception, most participants described personality traits or activities they enjoyed rather than physical characteristics when describing themselves. In
fact, only three participants, (2 female, 1 male) included physical descriptors of self.

Based on participant responses, it would seem that cultural/racial self-awareness may begin at a very early age, for some participants, even before entering the formal school system. It was also noted by some participants that the process of assessing and understanding childhood experiences in regards to race and culture did not occur until the high school years, when they would reflect upon earlier experiences.

Furthermore, participant comments also suggest that, for most participants, racial/cultural identity is not constantly focused on, but comes into conscious awareness on the basis of factors in the environment that trigger increased attention to this dimension of identity.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem has been defined as the positive or negative value which one places upon one's self-concept. In order to ascertain participants' positive or negative sense of self-esteem they were asked self-focusing questions as illustrated by the following:

- How do you feel about yourself?
- How would you describe yourself to others?
- Do you recall a point when you started thinking about racial issues?
- What makes you feel good?
- What makes you feel sad?
- Do you feel differently when out with black peers as opposed to peers of other races?
- Would you change anything about membership in your racial group if you could?

In general, participants expressed much more positive feelings of self-esteem than negative. Half of the participants (5 female, 5 male) stated that they felt very good about themselves. Other participants used terms such as "pretty good" and "okay" to describe
their feeling about themselves. Three participants (2 female, 1 male) stated that for them feelings of positive self-esteem were connected to school achievement.

**Question: How do you feel about yourself?**

**Nadia - 18 years old**

In the past I figured I was just another person, body, type of thing. But now I've come to appreciate myself a bit more...when I look back at things that I've done or come through, knowing that I came out on top, or at least I've managed to barely come out or something...I sort of figure myself to be a normal person.

**Candace - 18 years old**

...I like myself. I think I like the person that I'm becoming...I've never felt reason to look back and say "Oh well I never really liked myself then"...if I did get involved in something I don't think that it would of been because I didn't like myself... some kids do drugs and...drink, and go out to clubs at 14 and stuff. I was never into that. And I think it's because I like myself. I didn't feel the need to go out looking for something else to entertain myself.

**Nicholas - 16 years old**

I like myself. I like the way I'm growing up. I try to stay away from bad influences. I try to stay on the right track.

**David - 17 years old**

...I love myself. Not to be vain or anything but, I have lots of friends, my parents like me, my sisters...adore me, my...parents' friends like me...I have a good relationship with my teachers...I don't do drugs or smoking, alcohol. So I'm fairly healthy I guess.

**Michael - 17 years old**

...I like myself, I think...I'm a fairly confident person...I can still always find something that's wrong with myself, but I'm still very confident. I see myself as a person who learns fast...and I'm a good listener...really easy to get along with.

6 participants (4 female, 2 male) commented on feelings of negative esteem. The females tended to focus on physical characteristics. Two participants spoke positively of their physical make up. And, two participants stated that they sometimes did not like how they look. Males tended to focus on issues of social interaction - "fitting in" and personal achievement.
Question: How do you feel about yourself?

Naomi - 18 years old
...I feel that I should be doing more in school. I feel like I'm not doing enough for myself...in some ways I really feel comfortable with myself and in others I don't...I feel like I bother people or something...sometimes I feel like being with a lot of people other times I feel like I can be alone. It's all...mixed up...it doesn't really bother me as much as my appearance and other things...all my other sisters...I find they're prettier than I am and I feel like I'm...less than them....I feel...not self-confident about myself in some ways like that.

Question: How would you describe yourself to someone who just met you?

Nadia - 18 years old
...I feel you can't judge someone on what they've done but more on what they're trying to accomplish.

Question: What really makes you feel good?

Nicholas - 16 years old
...when I achieve what I want to achieve...and whenever I'm successful at whatever I'm doing, it makes me feel good about myself.

The majority of participants (6 female, 8 male) also stated that they were very satisfied with their identities as black people. A few participants did state that when younger, they had wished to be white (2 female, 1 male). Participants explained that this desire when younger was due to the fact that the images of beauty that they were exposed to while growing up focused on characteristics of white people.

Question: Would you still choose to be black if you had a choice?

Marcy - 15 years old
Well, before when I was younger I always wanted to be white 'cause that's pretty much all I knew. There was like, four black people in our school and that was all, like...family.

Question: How would you describe yourself?

Angela - 17 years old
Um, I'm tall. I love being tall. I'd never trade it for being short. I don't like people who
are short (laughing). You know I get asked a lot of questions like "How tall are you?"... 'Cause I'm six-two, six-three. It doesn't bug me. I think...the one time I was growing up...'cause I'm dark, like you know, I'm dark...one time my cousin and I were playing. We were just sitting there and..."I wonder if...I wish I was white." We always had our hair in braids and. "Oh, I wish I had long hair, like white people." And then I think we caught on to what we were saying and like, "What are we saying?!", you know? "I love our"...like," We love our hair."...But I think that was one of the only times I didn't like how I looked....I enjoy being black 'cause I don't feel any different. I know there's difference but with my family and with my black friends and all that, you feel comfortable with who you are. You know I've been this color when I was born, and I'm gonna be this color when I die. There's nothing now that's gonna make me lighter or anything.

Mark - 13 years old
I just like it. Yah. I don't know...I just like to be black. I've never really thought about being anything else.

David - 17 years old
I'd rather be black actually...some blacks say they want to be white 'cause they'd get the blonde girl or brunettes or what ever. I don't really care...I'm proud to be black I wouldn't want to change to white for a second, you know. If they paid me, I wouldn't want it.

Discussions in regard to participants' sense of self-esteem indicated that, in general, participants quite highly esteem themselves as individuals and as blacks. Participant responses also suggested that self-esteem moves between positive and negative evaluations depending on situations or circumstances encountered by the individual. This was illustrated by participants' reference to positive or negative feelings of self-esteem being connected to levels of achievement in educational and athletic pursuits, assessments of the individual's physical appearance against societal norms, and social situations in which individuals feel varying levels of comfort. This is important information to consider in relation to recent theoretical work (Bedner & Peterson, 1995; Metha and Nielson, 1994) which posits that self-concept and self-esteem are multi-dimensional constructs, and challenge longstanding notions of self-concept and self-esteem as unitary constructs.
Role Models

During the interviews participants were not specifically asked to name individuals whom they considered to be role models in their lives. However, nine participants (5 female, 4 male) did raise the issue of public personalities that they considered to be role models in order to illustrate their perceptions of blacks in contemporary society. The public personalities mentioned were Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and black civil rights activists of the 1960s.

Question: What sort of things make you sad?

Candace - 18 years old

...I know people who have fought as revolutionaries in the sixties and, I mean even if their contributions were small, or their voices weren't as loud as say Malcolm X or Angela Davis, they still fought...I believe you that you learn from the people that came before you. From their mistakes and their accomplishments...those black people who like, fell off, who were like, black American revolutionaries in the sixties, and now, sell outs, so to speak. I mean they must have had their reasons. It was probably pretty hard to stay that strong and that rigid, you know....I think that learning from them, and just seeing what they accomplished...and knowing that they made a dent...they were messing that system good. They were doin' some strong, some good, things. And it doesn't take an ass to do that...it takes more than a dummy to do that. It takes somebody with serious guts, and some serious mental capacity and intelligence to do that...I think that just seeing all of that and the constant battles that I deal with, of course it's gonna shape...the person that I am when I become a full fledged adult...

Participants also discussed public images such as models and the Barbie doll which they have affected them.

Question: How do you feel about yourself?

Angela - 17 years old

I think it's just the images that surround us, like barbie. I never had a black barbie. And dolls, you couldn't find black dolls....and everything on T.V., you never saw anything like that. I mean, you always was these people with long blonde beautiful hair... But I think
that was one of the only times I didn't like how I looked... I think I felt a lot more confident about myself down in the West Indies than here, you know. 'Cause nearly everyone down there, no matter what they looked like, they were still seen as beautiful but in their own way.

A couple of participants mentioned their awareness that other black youth view them as being role models.

**Question: How do you feel about yourself?**

Nadia - 18 years old
S - I know one girl told me I was her role model. It was like getting hit with a truck. I was like, "Not me."

I - Quite a compliment.

S - It was, because I was right up there along with Paula Abdul and Janet Jackson. That's what she said. I guess that says something.

Of interest is the fact that only female participants noted the impact of images of attractiveness on television on their personal lives. Not only did the images impact their own impression of self, it also impacted other individual's perceptions of the attractiveness of black women.

It was also interesting to note that when participant were themselves admired as role models, the male was told that he was admired because of his musical skills, while the female was told that she was admired because of her strong work ethic.

**Cultural/Racial Pride**

In the area of cultural and racial awareness most participants focused on issues of race rather than issues of culture. They spoke to their connection with other blacks in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. There were only a few responses that revolved around the participants' West Indian heritage, the culture,
music and dialects. It seems that the shared experience of historical racism and slavery strongly reinforces the connection that most participants feel towards blacks around the world.

Question: Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you really like?

Angela - 17 years old
I like knowing that we’ve survived so many things...so many types of hatred and brutality, but, we’re still here. We didn’t crack under the pressure...of being the only black person in a town. We just kept on going. Also I like knowing that we were once kings and queens and all that. I wish I knew more about that. I think that’s really interesting...knowing that, maybe God is actually black, and knowing that Cleopatra was black.

Candace - 18 years old
...some things I really love about both is the music...the calypso in Trinidad and the reggae in Jamaica...I love the talk, the way the people talk, because just sitting and listening to them to me is like another language. But I understand, you know. I can understand it, and it kind of feels like, "I do have a language." It’s English with my language, my English, you know? ‘Cause nobody can understand it....I like the fact that even with colonization and slavery and stuff...we’re still not like them. You know those people who did these things to us. We ended up in the Caribbean, and now some of us...in Canada, and those of us who ended up in the United States, you know, the south...you can’t loose who you are really...You can have bits and pieces of it fragmented and, and destroyed, wiped out. But you can’t loose the whole thing. It’s like something that nobody ever could ever have...I love the fact that...those of us who are here must... be coming from some strong ancestors because chances are the situations they’ve gone through, they should be dead.

Question: Do they teach about black Canadians in school?

Naomi - 18 years old
...even though they were born in the U.S., they were going for all blacks in all countries...they had their freedom, but they’re just trying to say that we’re all a community so we should all stick together. Like if you’re...in a richer country and a black and there are...poorer countries, the rich blacks...go on and help the poor blacks even though the whites don’t want to do it. So we should all like, stick together.

Question: Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you really like?

Michael - 17 years old
...I think I’m proud that...through all the things we’ve gone through as a people, and all
the terrible things we had to deal with ...we've still overcome all those hardships, and we're still a strong people.

Participants stressed the need for their race/culture to stick together. They expressed a sense of responsibility to pass cultural traditions on to their children.

**Question:** Do you think your racial heritage will affect your adult life in any particular way?

Marsha - 16 years old
...the way I was brought up and my cultural ways will always stay with me. I'm sure when I have kids they'll be brought up in the same culture, like the way my parents brought me up.

**Question:** Do you have a preference in terms of marriage partners?

Candace - 18 years old
...I also feel that I have a priority for my race. I want to see us carry on as black people. ...You know, it's just starting...the liquid...the, the melt down of black people...sometimes I just say that I don't want to be responsible for that.

Participants are also keenly aware of the fact that their individual actions impacted others perceptions of the entire black race. They feel responsible for presenting the race in a positive light.

**Question:** What sorts of things really make you feel good?

Dennis - 16 years old
....when you're playing a sport and there's not many...black people involved... when you play it, if you're good at it...it kinda like brings you out... above, as well as your race....you have to keep up like the good role model... you might go down and then you might bring your race down too. But you...can't really have that situation. You gotta keep going.

**Question:** Are their aspects of your racial heritage that you dislike?

Michael - 17 years old
I'm not so proud of the fact that as a people we don't seem to...always stick together. We seem to always have conflict ...within our background and it seems that...every time we're progressing we shoot ourselves in the foot and go back again. That's something I'm not very proud of...I don't want to give people the wrong sense.
In discussing their identities as black individuals, when the hypothetical situation of choice was posed to them, nineteen of the twenty participants stated that given a choice they would still choose to be black. One participant stated that she may not have made that decision.

**Question:** Let's suppose that somehow, that you have the ability to look at the society...you're not a part of it yet, would you still choose to be a black person?

**Candace - 18 years old**
Oh...yah...that's an excellent question because I always wonder that, "If I didn't have to be black, would I?" And, "If I wasn't black would I be concerned with this whole thing?"...I don't know how to answer it just because it's so easy to say, "Yes, I'd be a black person."... "Um, yes! Struggle, yes!"... "In the long run everything will be right!"...But it's really hard to say yes because maybe I wouldn't...Not necessarily that I would want to be white but I would probably say," Put me on a little tiny island in the Indian...in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Hopefully nobody knows I'm there and they can just leave me alone, 'cause I don't want to be part of it."

Four participants (2 female, 2 male) stated that they appreciate the uniqueness of being black in the Lower Mainland.

**Monica - 14 years old**
It's kinda neat knowing I'm part of that group. People out there notice that we kinda have our own style of dressing. And they kind of like that style of dressing even though it probably wouldn't suit them. But they like the style that everyone has.

**Question:** Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you really like?

**Ian - 13 years old**
Um...steel bands...all sorts of steel music. Lots of people approach and say "Oh, you're Jamaican." and stuff like that....being known as someone unique.

The issues most mentioned in the examination of the construct of cultural/racial pride was pride in black peoples' ability to survive the traumatic experiences which this race has encountered throughout history, and the black race's ability to thrive despite the
difficulties. Also noted by participants was the interconnectedness of personal responsibility and a sense of responsibility towards the racial group.

**Isolation/Acceptance**

Though the majority of respondents verbalised positive feelings of personal self-esteem and indicated a great deal of pride in their black identity, there was still a fairly consistent expression of a sense of isolation within their schools and communities. Twelve participants (7 female, 5 male) stated that they felt isolated from other blacks and wished there was a greater black presence in their local communities.

**Question:** You used the term "feeling out of place." Is that an experience you have here?

**Angela - 18 years old**

*I think just with people who don't know me or people just walking down the street or something. I mean, sitting in the classrooms you look around and you're the only black kid in there. Or in a store or something like that, there are only one or two other black people....we're spread out so much, black people. We're spread out so much in B.C. or even just in the lower mainland...we don't live in one community like back east...I always say hello to black people though...if I see somebody new I'll say hi to them in the hallway or something. I don't do that with white people...you can count on your fingers how many black people there are.*

**Question:** Do recall a point at which you started thinking about racial issues?

**Candace - 18 years old**

...I just knew I was different, you know, like compared to...to what was around, what everyone else saw as normal, I guess or ordinary... Because they have their Asian community right here, Chinatown....you have a place where you don't necessarily feel too threatened talking about this or that. Me? All I have is the walls of my house. And sometimes it's so much bigger than that you know....

**Question:** How do you view the black community in the lower mainland?

**David - 17 years old**

*I wish I was in a neighborhood with black people. I don't mean to be biased or anything...I just wish I lived in a neighborhood that was at least fifty percent black...It gives you*
the feeling of... family when they come around... I've always wanted that to happen. I just hope it happens in the future.

Twelve participants (5 female, 7 male) also stated that they experienced a comfort level and a feeling of acceptance when interacting with black individuals that they do not feel when interacting with individuals of other racial backgrounds. Black peers have a deeper understanding of the unique issues they face as black youth. Four participants (all female) stated that their intimate friendships are only with other blacks because they are more at ease when with people of their own racial group. Several participants without close black friends wish to develop friendships with other black youth, for the same reason.

**Question:** Do you feel differences when out with people of your own cultural or racial group than when you're out with people of other cultures and races?

**Tina - 14 years old**
You talk about different things when you're with your own culture than with somebody of a different culture....like to talk about a person, like... Malcolm X, or Martin Luther King. I feel more comfortable talking about it with my own culture.

**Question:** How would you describe your friends?

**Marcy - 15 years old**
...most of the time I'm with my two closest black friends. I don't know, we just seem to have a lot more fun together. We can relate a lot easier.

**Question:** Who do you talk to about racial issues when they come up?

**Tricia - 17 years old**
S - ...I can't exactly talk to my white friends about it, 'cause they wouldn't understand......they always used to um... ask me like, "How come you don't wash your hair every day?" I'd just try to explain to them that I just don't, but, you know.

I - That hair thing just keeps coming up, doesn't it?!

S - I tell them over and over again why I don't... I only wash my hair on the weekends.
But it's like no matter how many times I try to explain to them, it's like, it's like they don't listen...Or, they don't want to understand.

Question: Have you ever visited a community where the majority of people were black?

Angela - 17 years old
As soon as I hit Toronto, I think I knew exactly where I was going. I hardly saw one white person. And then when I hit Trinidad I knew I was home...I knew that people weren't just looking at me. They were looking at me because I was a different person, like I was a person, not because I was a different color, like in Canada. You didn't feel out of place. As soon as I got there I knew where I was and where I stood and everything. I didn't have to worry about people looking at me in a different way.

Question: When the racial heritage is the same, do you thing that plays a factor in bringing you together as friends?

Candace - 18 years old
...if I just landed in a group of black people that I don't know... for me I think that the mere fact that I'm with black people and that they're with other black people, we all feel so connected just because it's like, "Oh, yeh!"... "Oo this is so!" Cherish the moment because it might not come again too soon....

Nicholas - 16 years old
...it was kinda nice to see everyone that looks exactly like you...even though you dress differently and talk differently...it's still nice to see that there are places where there's just all black people and the white people are the ones who stick out.

Question: When the racial heritage is the same, do you think that plays a factor in bringing you together as friends?

Dennis - 16 year old male
I notice that you have...a lot more fun...when I'm out with a group of black people... 'cause sometimes we talk, you know, the Jamaican lingo.

Michael - 17 years old
I feel that closeness with a person of a same racial heritage because we can talk about the same things. We feel the same way. Problems that happen, we seem to deal with them the same way...I just kind of feel in place with my racial heritage...

Some participants also noted that though they longed for increased interaction with other black youth, for various reasons they found it very difficult to connect with them, even
when the opportunity presents itself.

**Question: How would you describe your friends?**

**Angela - 18 years old**
S - I wish I had closer black friends because...when I'm going through this maybe "black power" thing or something...they understand exactly what I'm feeling. They know exactly what I'm saying. They understand exactly. And they don't question it because they probably feel the same way too.

I - You know, I hear what you're saying from a lot of black kids and I'm wondering why is it, do you think, that you're all at a school together...and maybe there are just 10 or 12 of you....why is it, do you think, that that isn't happening? You maintain that acquaintance but you're not getting to be really tight friends?

S - Sometimes I find it hard to talk to black people, because I don't really know what to say. I don't know how to act. I mean I don't know if I should act kinda home girl thing...because they might look at me like "What are you tryin' ta prove." right? ...you're trying too hard. Or if I just talk like I usually do and...sound educated or something, they might look at me and say, "Well what's going on? You don't sound black. You sound so white."

**Question: What is your involvement with the local black community?**

**Candace - 18 years old**
...sometimes you get a black community like, and it gets so bourgeois you know, because you've got all these people who are just trying to be white, basically...I think also we have a problem where we don't want to be singled out as a black person by another black person.

Participants further stated that their white friends do not understand issues unique to black people. They noted a difference in the communication styles of themselves and their white peers. They also noted that at times situations became uncomfortable when white peers were being quite obvious in attempting not to offend their black friends in their conversations.
Question: Do you feel differently when out with black friends than when out with friends of other races?

Monica - 14 years old
...you'll notice differences in how black people communicate, the way we handle things, the way we joke around.

Naomi - 18 years old
...'cause when you're with white people...you can't express yourself the same way you express yourself with the black people because black people have sort of like a way of communicating and it's fun...you feel good. Then when you're with the white person...it's totally in a different world. And they have a different way of acting and you're just there, standing there...you accept it but, it's not as fun as when you're with the black people 'cause we're like more lively and we have more fun...

Question: Do you wish you had black friends or do you feel pretty comfortable with your current group of friends?

Mark - 13 years old
I feel pretty comfortable but sometimes I feel like I need...black friends to kinda understand like what's going on.

Question: Do you think your racial or ethnic background makes a difference in how you relate to other people and how they relate to you?

David - 17 years old
...going to school where ah...let's see...there are six hundred more guys who are white or Asian ah...can be tough, you know...I just wish that I went to...not an all black school, but a school which...had at least 30, 40 blacks. To give me people to talk to, you know. You know for example...when Nelson Mandela was in prison, you can't go to a typical white, and discuss that issue. It just doesn't feel right... I wish there were more black friends that I could talk to, you know, to relate to....Let's just make it comfortable for all of us.

Participants are keenly aware of the fact that they are growing up in an environment that is somewhat racially insolated in comparison to the experiences of most black youth raised in North America. The majority of participants are quite envious of the experiences of black youth raised in larger black communities. Only one participant stated that, in comparison to the norms in other communities, black youth in the Vancouver region tend
to have better educational opportunities and higher standards of living.

Participants stated that they were greatly appreciative of those times that they were in the presence of a large group of other blacks, whether the occasion was a special event in the local black community or a vacation in a community with a large black population. Their appreciation was based on it being a limited experience for them. Also, it was only when in the presence of other blacks that participants felt a sense of total acceptance or being 'in place'.

Though they long for the companionship of other black youth, some participants pointed out that they had difficulty forming relationships with the black youth they do come across, partially because they were unfamiliar with interacting with other blacks, and were afraid that they will be assessed negatively by them as not being 'black enough'.

Finally, participants also noted that though they develop close friendships with youth of other racial heritages, there was a ongoing level of discomfort based on differences in communication styles. Furthermore, they felt that they must constantly deal with innuendos and jokes based on race, often times as the only visible minority in the group.

**Locus of Control**

Locus of control relates to an individual's perception of the relationship between themselves and the environment. Locus of control can be internal or external (Griffore & Parsons, 1983; Kinder, & Reeder, 1975). Individuals with a strong sense of internal locus of control "... believe that rewards follow from or are contingent upon one's own behavior (Cindio, Floyd, Wilcox, & McSeveney, 1983, p. 369). Individuals with a strong sense of external locus of control " believe that rewards follow from or are contingent upon one's
own behavior " (Cindio, et al., 1983, p.369).

In order to examine the construct of locus of control, through the analysis of participant responses I attempted to answer the following question - Do participants feel that they are in control of their situation/environment or do they perceive the situation/environment to be controlling them? As it turned out, the answer to this question appears to be - both. As can be noted from the transcript excerpts presented, participants expressed both a sense of internal control, an ability to take charge of their lives, and at the same time a sense of being controlled by external forces. The area of greatest person control seemed to be interpersonal relationships, while the larger social, political, and economic arenas were generally cited as being the areas in which they could not personally affect conditions.

Participant responses to many of the questions posed provided some insight into their sense of locus of control. However the main questions posed in this regard included:

Do you feel that your parents place a lot of expectations on you?
How do you feel about yourself?
How would you describe yourself to others?
Do you think that your racial or ethnic background makes a difference in how you relate to other people or how they look at you and relate to you?
Do you think your racial heritage will affect your adult life in any particular way? If so, how?
Do you think that having the minority experience gives you any special skills for the future?

The next four quotations from participants illustrate their locus of control orientation.

Comments by Monica and Nadia illustrate internal orientations, David's comment illustrate an external orientation, and Candace's comments illustrate a mixture of both internal and external orientations.
Internal Orientation

Question: Do you think that your racial or ethnic background makes a difference in how you relate to other people or how they look at you and relate to you?

Monica - 14 years old
I think sometimes what I do makes a difference in how they are, if you're kind and nice to them.

Question: Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you dislike?

Nadia - 18 years old
Those that don't reach out to try to fulfil their potential, and all throughout their history think, "I've got to stay here, 'cause this person put me down."... Those are people who choose not to rise above things. That always frustrates me.

External Orientation

Question: Do you think your racial heritage will affect your adult life in any particular way?

David - 17 years old
...just have to put up with it I guess, right? I guess until ...a black person is elected to a higher position in parliament,...it'll always be like this.

Mixed Orientation

Question: How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?

Candace - 18 years old
...I don't know what anyone can really do now because it's like such a systematic thing that goes on. It doesn't look like we're headed for any major revolution in...North America, like they did in the sixties...Whatever you have in store for you, whether it's good or whether it's bad, it's not just God up there or whoever deciding this. It's you, you know, like...you decide your fate, not any god. Life is what you make it. You're responsible for yourself....I want to be able to talk to anybody...and inform them that I'm not stupid and that you can't walk on me.

Participants seemed to be very aware of the fact that when dealing with issues of prejudice and discrimination, inner motivation and/or personal action does not always lead to change. The question then becomes - How do individuals deal with the negative
experiences faced on an ongoing basis? This question will be examined in the following section.

**Coping Strategies/Support Systems**

The main issue explored in this research was participants' perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of their experiences as black youth growing up in the lower mainland. In particular I was interested in ascertaining how the positive aspects of their experiences were accentuated and how the negative aspects were diminished.

Many coping strategies were discussed by participants. However, there were four strategies that were consistently raised. The strategies identified by participants included: family support, peer support, increased levels of tolerance, and religious beliefs.

**Family Support**

Participants reported that their main network of support was their parents and siblings. Family discussions tended to focus on the family's personal history and the history of blacks in general. The themes involved in these conversations included the pride in racial and cultural identity and heritage; the struggles of black people throughout history; and the resiliency and strong survival instinct within black cultures.

**Question: Who do you talk to about racial issues?**

**Angela - 17 years old**

... *I feel really comfortable talking to my mom about almost everything. If I don't, there's someone in my family I feel comfortable talking to...* I mean I feel good about myself. I think I have a good head on my shoulders. I've been taught really well, from my mom and my dad, to just like me for who I am... *In my family we've always talked about that kind of thing. We have books and we've been in groups and all that, where we talk about those kind of things. And so I think...* well, maybe I have it better than some black kids whose parents don't talk to them about their heritage in Canada and the West Indies.*
Question: What really makes you feel good?

Candace - 18 years old
...it's like my mom says, in this world, in this society, unless you conform, you can't survive without your tribe, and that's what she calls it, her tribe. She says that we've gotta...build up our tribe because we've lost it, and that's what was keeping us alive and strong right...I think because my mom is so straight with me and my sisters, that I just learned to be really straight with people ...not just straight in order to... just tell them off or whatever, just to tell them just exactly how I feel.

Question: What's your relationship like with your parents and sister?

Dennis - 16 years old
I think I'm very lucky to have the family that I do and...because I don't think any other family would give me this amount of support and help to go along in life.

Question: Who do you talk to about racial issues?

Only one participant, Michael, mentioned that his parents do not like to talk about issues of race with him.

Michael - 17 years old
.... it's something that my parents really don't like talking about, actually, to tell you the truth....we were never brought up with that type of mind set of being racially aware, whatever...whatever you want to call it. I think my parents... don't want us to see things in those type of ways and they just want..protecting... they haven't really put that into our minds as something that's of importance to always keep on your mind.

An observation noted by a few participants was that as supportive as their parents were, there are limitations to the degree to which parents can understand the experiences of their children. The parents of all participants were born and raised in the West Indies. During the parents developmental phase their race and culture was that of the dominant group in the society. Therefore they are not familiar with the issues faced by their children who are being raised in an environment where they are of visible minority status.
Question: Was there anything more that you wanted to say about your experiences as a black person growing here in Vancouver?

Marsha - 16 years old
See my parents, I don’t think they know because obviously they were brought up around all black people. They would never know what it’s like to be brought up here and go to school. All you see is white people. But when they went to school, it was all black.

Another ongoing theme within family discussions focused on the hierarchical social structure within Canadian society. A number of participants reported that their parents have imparted to them the message that blacks in Canada can not expect to achieve the same status as other races, and in particular white Canadians, by performing to the same level. In order to achieve the same status blacks must try harder and accomplish more.

Parents stressed that this need for a higher level of performance starts within the school system and continues in the work force.

Question: Well do you think that um...being a minority is there anything that you have to do differently than most people...?

Monica - 14 years old
You have to work harder...you know, to make sure.

Question: Do you feel that your racial heritage will affect your adult life in any particular way?

Michael - 17 years old
...well I find because being black you have to ...you have to work just as hard, or harder, to ...for, say to get a job, or, say for business.

Peer Support

A majority of participants reported that one of their main coping mechanisms was the ability to discuss issues of racism and discrimination with black peers. Though most participants had friends of many racial and cultural heritages, as illustrated by quotes in
the friendship subsection of the micro-environment section presented earlier, they had a much higher level of comfort in discussing these issues with peers of their own racial heritage. This was mainly because the shared experiences of black youth leads to a level of understanding beyond the understanding of other peers. Participants also noted that in discussing issues with non-black peers there is a greater need to explain, expand on and detail experiences, and justify perceptions. Participants who did not have black peers to discuss these issues with stated a desire to establish this avenue of support. It should be noted that a considerably larger number of female participants spoke to the importance of discussing their experiences with black peers than did male participants (7 female, 3 male).

**Question:** Who do you talk to about racial issues?

**Angela - 17 years old**

"I talk to my cousins, my mom, my aunt. I talk to my friends, but I don't really talk to them too much about it. Just a couple of them. Because, I don't really know if they'll understand where I'm coming from... But I mostly talk to my cousins about it cause they're young. They know exactly what I'm saying. They understand. They might be going through the same thing at that point... I know that I'll get some good, positive feedback. I wouldn't get fake... not understanding, you know... just saying "Oh, just deal with it"... "No, I don't want to just deal with it. I want to do something about it."... But some people might give to me... "This is not a big deal." But it is a big deal... my cousins and I, we see it's a big deal. We talk about it openly.

**Question:** Is there anything you would like to add about your experience as a black male growing up in Vancouver?

**Christopher - 17 years old**

"'cause people are trying to bring you down, in my experience just make sure you got a close friend. Choose one close friend... It's good to have one good friend 'cause you always know that you have one that won't sell you out. They'll do anything for you."
Increased Tolerance

The issue of tolerance was raised from a couple of vantage points. Participants discussed coping with prejudice and discrimination through the tolerance and acceptance of viewpoints other than their own. It was interesting to observe that in the participants' reports there was an apparent gender difference in how participants attempted to cope with and respond to cross-cultural misunderstanding and racism. Males tended to talk about being non-judgmental, easy-going, and unobtrusive. Typically, the response of male participants focused on passive modes of tolerance and acceptance. On the other hand, though females also spoke to some degree of being non-judgmental and trying to be non-offensive to others, they tended to focus more on actively seeking out and interacting with individuals of other cultural heritages in order to increase their own understanding and tolerance.

Participants also discussed tolerance in the sense of developing a "a thick skin" to cope with the prejudice and discrimination they face. In other words they had come to accept that, to varying degrees, prejudice and discrimination will be one of their ongoing life experiences.

Question: Do you think that having the minority black experience gives you any special skills for the future?

Marcy - 15 years old
I think it helps me a lot being a black child or teenager because I've already experienced what it's like to be segregated against. And so when it happens now...whenever I see segregation...I know how to deal with it a lot better 'cause I've already been through it ....it's given me...strength...I guess you could say I've got higher tolerance...I know how to handle it a lot better.
Nicholas - 16 years old
probably...because there are people who are very prejudiced and I'm going to have to deal with it sooner or later. And it's best that you know it's there and then you know how to deal with it when it hits you. Not that all of a sudden it's just going to hit you. But you shouldn't also be going...looking for it, and blaming everything. If you don't get a job you start blaming...it's because you're black. But I think it would help you in the long run...build up who you are. But you can also use it in a negative way.

Christopher - 17 years old
You learn to cope with...You learn to cope with...negative comments about your race. I guess it makes you stronger.

Question: Do you recall a point in your life when you started thinking about racial issues?

David - 17 years old
...you got to admit we're living in a white man's world so you have to make due with what you have basically. I try to do that.

For most participants a level of tolerance was possible because the negative experiences were balanced by the positive messaging from their families and racial/cultural community which they have internalized, as was documented earlier when participants commented on their pride in their black heritage.

Religious Beliefs

Many participants also spoke of the importance of their religious beliefs in assisting them to cope, and their involvement in organized religion as being an important support system.

Question: Does religion play a role in your life?

Nadia - 18 years old
...it's always been there since I was born...I go to church every Sunday...looking back I don't think I'd really change that. No matter what's going on in my life, that's always been a constant. You know it's like a...stability...that you can always go back to church, That's it. You know...people come and go, and that may happen, but the church has
always been there.

Michael - 17 years old
...well, growing up in a Christian family...I have different values than a lot of my friends do, and I look at life a whole different way...I find peace of mind in different things, not in the worldly things such as alcohol and drugs and stuff...it helps me look at things differently, deal with problems differently...I interact with people differently because I look at the situations differently, basically.

Of interest is the fact that when discussing coping strategies and support systems, the school environment was not viewed by any participant as being one in which they were assisted in developing effective coping strategies. Nor were school personnel identified as being components of participants' support systems. Many participants stated that, in general, school personnel did not understand the issues faced by black youth.

Future Goals

In addition to ascertaining participant's perceptions in regards to the current experiences and issues encountered as a black youth in the lower mainland, the purpose of this investigation also included an examination of the participant's views on how their race and their current experiences will either assist or impede them in future goals. Future goals were viewed from the perspectives of both career aspirations and general lifestyle issues.

In terms of career aspirations, occupational choices identified are outlined on the table presented on the next page.
Table #8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Aspirations</th>
<th>female</th>
<th>male</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lawyer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
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<td>professional athlete</td>
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<tr>
<td>performing arts</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>writer/journalist</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>psychiatrist</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>business</td>
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<td>architect</td>
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<td>pilot</td>
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<td>engineer</td>
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There did not appear to be significant gender differences in occupational choices identified, however, this may be due to the fact of a relatively small sample size. Three females did identify the traditionally female occupations (teacher and nurse) which were not identified by any males as an option, while males alone identified professional athlete, architect, pilot, and engineer. However, the occupations of doctor and lawyer were identified by six females and only two males. Of interest, is the fact that homemaker was not identified by any participant as being a viable option.

In general, participants are very optimistic about the prospects of achieving career aspirations. Most participants plan to attain some sort of post secondary education. Eleven participants (5 female, 6 male) specifically stated that they will be attending university. There is a recognition on participants' part that they are likely to face forms of prejudice and discrimination based on race and gender when in the work force. However,
most participants do not view these barriers as being insurmountable.

**Question: Do you think that your race is going to affect your adult life or future goals in any particular ways?**

**Angela - 17 years old**

*I think I probably will run into situations where I will be looked at as different. You know, maybe applying for jobs or something. But then at that time I also hope that there’ll be black people who will be doing the hiring...who will be in those more superior roles, so that I won't have any problems...I think I'm prepared for them if something does happen. But I really don't expect anything to happen.*

**Nicholas - 16 years old**

*I think that because of who I am, and because of my personality, that people will look past my colour and see that I’m a good person, that I work hard...I'm not looking for people to put me down. If I see someone putting me down I may not think of it as being racism. I just might think of them as not being very good people. So I won't let that stop me. So I'll just continue to strive for what I want to do, and strive for what I want to be.*

**Christopher - 17 years old**

*S - I don't know. Ah...employment. Although they say Charter of Rights and that, don’t matter. That's kinda...That's bogus. It's just a...up front. I take it...I look at it that way.*

*I - So you don't think the Charter of Rights is really going to protect people?*

*S - It won't protect you, no. Once you're black you're always labelled I guess.*

One participant stated that she feels that her race will impact her career in a positive way. She aspired to be a writer.

**Question: Do you think your race is going to affect your future goals in any way?**

**Nadia - 18 years old**

*S - Yah, but for the most part in a good way just because of what I want to do. There aren't too many other people putting out the black woman's view. So that would be different.*

In terms of general life goals, aspirations were basically the same for males and females —marriage and a family. However, many participants stated that these are not issues.
that they dwell on too much at this point as their major goals are to finish school and establish careers. Of interest to note is the desire stated by six participants (5 female, 1 male) to relocate to predominantly black communities in the future. The two reasons noted were a desire to raise their children amongst other blacks, and particularly for the females, the desire to be in a community where there is a greater likelihood of finding black dating and marriage partners.

**Question: Do you think you're always going to live here or will you live in other places?**

**Tricia - 17 years old**

*I wanna move and...I guess when I'm older...it's no problem living here, but I wouldn't want to for like my whole life. Because...I don't know. I don't know, I find this part of Canada a little bit...it's too slow down here. There's like...not much for black people down here...I guess for my own kids...I'd want them to grow up around black people....I wouldn't want them to live like how I grew up here. I'd want them to live around their own race too.*

It would appear that the greatest desire of participants is to be accepted within whatever social milieu they are in without feeling a need to compromise their identity as black people. The following excerpt expressed it well:

**Question: What are your future goals?**

**Candace - 18 years old**

*I don't really know for sure yet. But I know I wanna...help black people and I wanna know more about people. I wanna be able to speak different languages, but still be black. I wanna be able to sit and talk with the president, but still be black, and sit with a group of homeless people and still be black. And not have...you know not have a superiority complex, and not have an inferiority complex, just be myself.*

Participants appeared to assess future goals and aspirations from a realistic vantage point. They recognized that there were many factors which would influence their abilities to achieve their goals. Factors referred to by participants include personal motivation,
intercultural communication skills, systemic change (removal of barriers), and location (racial mix of social environment).
CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion and Interpretation

In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the major findings of the research I conducted. This will be followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the phases of development common to the racial/ethnic identity development models presented earlier in the literature review. I will then discuss the relationships found between the variables that were identified for exploration at the onset of the investigation and present causal networks which illustrate the interrelationships. The succeeding section will discuss issues related to black youths experiences within the school system and recommendations for change. Throughout the discussion of major findings and recommendations, reference will be made to the findings of related research. In the final section I will review and respond to the research questions and hypotheses posed at the beginning of the investigation.

Summary of Research Findings

This investigation found that the variables which most impact identity formation in the second generation black youth, of Caribbean heritage, participating in this study, include the coping strategies used, in particular the relationship with parents; the gender of the individual, and the locus of control orientation of the individual. The other issue most often identified by participants is a sense of isolation from other blacks and a lack of acceptance in the macro-environment, the school system in particular.

A general pattern of identity awareness and development emerged as participants discussed their experiences. The overriding theme of isolation was especially acute when participants were in elementary school. There was a keen awareness of their 'difference'
from the other children and the staff. For some participants, this difference was pointed
out to them, for others the awareness was based on personal observations. A few
participants stated that during their childhood years they had desired to be white, or felt
that white people were more attractive than themselves. Although a few participants
spoke of feelings of negative self-esteem, they did so only in connection to their
childhood days when they wanted to be white. However, the majority of participants
stated that they had never felt a desire to be anything other than what they were. In fact,
some participants said that not only did they get used to being different, they came to
enjoy their unique status.

At some point in the high school years, generally between the ages of thirteen to
fifteen, participants start to consciously explore their black identity. This exploration is
usually preceded by specific incidents in the environment, positive or negative. For some
participants the trigger was racial slurs or harassment directed at themselves or friends, for
others the trigger was visiting predominantly black communities in eastern Canada, the
United States, or the Caribbean, and feeling a sense of 'fit' or acceptance for the first time.
After these experiences, participants tend to develop a stronger interest in exploring the
history of blacks in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean. For these participants, the
macro-environment ( e.g., school, work, community ) remained racially dissonant, but
their micro-environment ( e.g., family, relatives, peers ) becomes increasingly racially
consonant. They seek greater connection with black peers. Most participants reported
developing very close friendships with one or two black peers during the adolescent years.
These friendships become an important part of the participants' support systems and serve
to counter-balance the isolation they often experience. They also maintain or increase their friendships with peers of other racial/ethnic minority group. However, they start to interact less with white peers, with the exception of white peers who attempt to 'fit in' to the friendship circle by 'acting more black'.

**Relationship of Findings to Phases of Ethnic Identity Development**

As discussed earlier, models of racial/ethnic identity formation, such as those developed by Cross (Gay, 1985; Parham, 1989), Banks (1981), and Erikson (1968), postulate three distinct phases of identity development: unexamined identity; an encounter experience which promotes identity exploration; and, commitment to an identity (Phinney, 1989). In this section, the findings of this research will be discussed in relation to the three phases outlined by Phinney (1989). During the presentation of each phase, aspects of the identity development models presented in the literature review will be compared to the findings of this investigation. This section also makes a great deal of comparison to the work of Parham (1985, 1989) and Helms (1985, 1989) as these researchers have studied extensively ethnic identity development in black youth. They also provide critiques of various ethnic identity development models. Additionally, Parham has proposed his own model of racial identity development in black youth in which he has labelled the developmental process 'nigrescence' (1989). The final part of this section will examine Helm's (1989) notion of the multidimensional process of identity development.

**Unexamined Identity**

In discussing Cross' model, Parham and Helms (1985) identify the stage of
unexamined identity, labelled pre-encounter by Cross, as being the least mentally healthy. It is usually accompanied by feeling of inadequacy, inferiority, and lack of self-acceptance (Parham & Helms, 1985). This stage relates to phase one of the developmental phases outlined by Phinney (1989).

A few participants in this study were identified as being in phase one. They made comments such as "I don't think about racial issues." These were some of the younger participants, mainly 13 and 14 year olds. These participants were less likely to have close friendships with other black youth. This finding supports Cross's assertion that the childhood years are a time of 'ethnic innocence' (Gay, 1985). However, the majority of participants stated that their awareness of racial issues and their identities as black people began at a very early age.

The aspect of Milner's doll preference study (Cohen and Manion, 1983) which concluded that children are in fact aware of racial identity issues is consistent with the findings of this study. However, unlike Milner's finding which suggests that a large majority of West Indian children living in societies which are predominantly white show a marked preference for the dominant racial group over their own racial group, the majority of participants in this investigation stated that they have never felt a preference for the dominant racial group over their own group. However, because the findings of this study are based on the recollections of the participants of their childhood years, it is possible that perception of experiences can change over time.

**Encounter Experience**

Though participants' responses indicated the presence of all three of these phases, the
phase that appeared to be most prevalent was the second phase of encounter and identity exploration.

Cross' model identified the second phase as being the encounter and immersion/emersion stages (Parham, 1989). According to Cross, this stage is often accompanied by a degree of hostility towards the dominant culture. In Bank's model (1981), this phase is represented by the stages of encapsulation, and ethnic identity clarification. This phase is also indicated in Marcia's model of identity formation as the stage of moratorium (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

The encounter phase was manifest in the majority of participants in this study in a number of ways. A few participants expressed anger at the injustices they suffered as young children and dismay at the fact that at a younger age they had wished to be white. A larger group of participants expressed feelings that they don't "fit in" in most social situations where other blacks are not present. And many participants spoke of their frustration within the school system because they do not see a reflection of their own cultural heritage. Participants also exhibit a great deal of pride in their black identity, particularly around issues of resilience and survival.

The phase of encounter and exploration appears to be essential in the lives of individuals raised in racially dissonant environments. In order to maximize mental health they need to experience a sense of total acceptance either through the development of a racially consonant microcosm, or through relocation to a racially consonant macrocosm. Most of the participants in this study have either developed a black friendship microcosm in which they immerse themselves, or they wish for a black friendship microcosm in which
to belong.

In her study of black adolescents, based on Erikson's theory of ego development, Watson (1991) found the majority of participants to be engaged in identity exploration rather than identity foreclosure. The term 'foreclosure' is also used in Marcia's identity development model, which is also based on Erikson's theory of ego development (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Watson hypothesized that as these youth have greater and more diverse opportunities than black youth in the past, they may tend to engage in identity exploration for a longer period of time rather than finalizing an ego identity in mid-adolescence. The stages of foreclosure and exploration described by Watson and Marcia, fit into the second phase of identity development as outlined by Phinney (1989).

Research results are also corroborated by the study by Parham and Helms (1985) in which they concluded that the "...awakening black identity (encounter attitudes) was positively related to self-actualization tendencies and negatively related to feelings of inferiority and anxiety."(p. 431). This finding suggests that, rather then experiencing a sense of negative self-esteem, adolescents in the encounter stage of ethnic identity development are likely to be experiencing a sense of heightened self-awareness and positive self-esteem. The present research comes to the same conclusion.

Helms (1989) noted that most studies of black racial identity development take place in predominantly white environments. These studies have not found high levels of pre-encounter or immersion attitudes amongst participants. Helms further stated that "...individuals with high levels of immersion attitudes should be a rarity in predominantly
white environments "(p. 234). While my research findings support Helm's contention that there are low levels of pre-encounter attitudes amongst participants, the findings do not support the contention that there are low levels of immersion attitudes. In fact, the findings suggest that as participants move into adolescence, immersion attitudes increase quite significantly as indicated by the movement towards black peer and away from white peer. Helms does not account for the fact that even individuals residing in racially dissonant environments visit other, racially consonant environments. In this study, the experience of travelling to an environment where the individual felt accepted, greatly influenced a movement into immersion attitudes for many participants.

**Commitment to an Identity**

A couple of participants seem to have moved to phase three of racial/ethnic identity development—commitment to an identity. These participants show a pride in, and commitment to their black identity, but they also are quite comfortable operating within the environments in which dominant cultural norms, values, and traditions, predominate. Bank's describes such individuals as being biethnic (1981). Again age seems to be a factor as these were some of the older participants in the study.

Furthermore, because some of the individuals tend to develop close friendships with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, they also become adept in interacting in environments in which the values and norms may be different from those of their own group and from those of the dominant culture. According to Banks these individuals are moving into the stage of multiethnicity (1981).
The Multidimensional Process of Racial Identity Development

Helms (1989) suggests that, rather than being one dimensional, racial identity development is a multidimensional process. She stated:

...an individual's racial identity might differ depending on what aspect of his or her life one is considering. Thus, a person's racial identity concerning the world of work might be governed by one stage of identity, whereas his or her racial identity concerning social relationships might reflect another (1989, p.242).

Therefore, according to Helms, individuals may exhibit different developmental stages in different social contexts. For example, an individual may be in the commitment phase of development when interacting with close friends of other cultural groups, but in an encounter phase when dealing with different cultural groups in a more general way.

In her interview, 17 year old Angela made comments that illustrate Helm's point well. Angela stated that when interacting with her close friends of other racial groups she treats them as individuals and respects them as people. However, when discussing her feelings about other cultural groups in general, Angela admits to stereotyping them. It would seem that in her intimate interactions with people of other racial groups in her micro-environment, Angela is in the commitment phase, whereas when viewing people of other cultures in the macro-environment, Angela is in the encounter phase.

Based on Helm's speculation, I would suggest that the stages of identity manifest in differing situations may also be accompanied by differing senses of self-esteem. For example, even though participants stated that in general their self-esteem is very positive, they also acknowledged that they feel more comfortable in certain environments than they
do in others. It may be that in some environments the identity stage manifest is pre-encounter, which is associated with a more negative sense of self-esteem (Helms, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1985), while in other circumstances, the stage manifest may be encounter or commitment. These stages are associated with a more positive sense of self-esteem (Helms, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1985).

**Relationship Between Variables**

At the onset of this investigation six variables were identified to be examined in regard to their roles in identity development, and in particular the development of self-concept and self-esteem, in black youth. The identified variables were age, gender, coping strategies, consonant or dissonant racial environments, values conflict resolution, and visible minority status. The results of this investigation suggest that a complex interrelationship exists between the variables.

In this section, the interrelationships found between variables will be summarized. Four networks are used to illustrate the interrelationships. The networks do not show the complexity of relationships but they do present isolated strands of connectedness. In the networks presented, arrows are used to indicate the relational direction between variables. Each network display is followed by a discussion of the relationship between the variables found in this study, as well as a comparison of these findings to theories and studies of other researchers. Following the network displays and discussions, I will analyse variables of racial/cultural identity, coping strategies, influence of immigration, and socioeconomic status individually.

To conclude this section I will summarize the relationship found among all variables.
identified in the study. As a part of this summary, the relationship among all variables will be outlined in a diagram.

**Network #1**

Based on the finding of this study as well as the previously noted research findings, the possible effects of racially dissonant and racially consonant social environments on the development of positive or negative self-esteem in black youth is hypothesized as illustrated in network #1.

**Network #1**

(co-existing environments)

racially dissonant  \(\rightarrow\) \(\rightarrow\) racially consonant

macro-environment \(\leftrightarrow\) micro-environment

(school and larger community) \(\leftrightarrow\) (family, relatives, black peer)

isolation \(\leftrightarrow\) development of peer support system \(\leftrightarrow\) positive self-esteem

negative self-esteem

Some theorists and researchers have suggested that a large portion of visible minority children internalize the negative images of their race that is portrayed in the larger society (Hurtsfield, 1978, Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Other researchers have found that black youth develop positive self-esteem in spite of negative messages from the wider society (Banks, 1984; Frisby & Tucker, 1993; Madhere, 1991).

Banks' (1984) study in the Pacific North West region of the United States, examined the attitudes and self-concepts of black youth residing in pre-dominantly white suburbs. Banks concluded that socialization within this environment did not prevent the black youth
from developing positive attitudes towards themselves, their schools, people of diverse racial/cultural backgrounds, and their communities.

Frisby & Tucker (1993) reported that studies in which comparisons are made between the self-esteem of black and white individuals have concluded that there are either no significant difference, or where there were differences, blacks exhibited higher senses of self-esteem than whites. A study by Madhere (1991) also concluded that black youth exhibit a 'wholesome' self-concept "...despite the many dissonant signals they receive from the wider social environment." (p. 58).

The majority of participants in this investigation do not recall feelings of negative self-esteem as children. Although they did admit to feeling a greater sense of comfort, acceptance, and belonging in their high school environment, once they began to have increased interaction with other black peers. It would appear that, in general, these participants found mechanisms through which they avoided the acceptance of negative images as an accurate reflection of themselves.

A possible explanation for the contrasts in the findings of this study, as compared to studies which have found that a large portion of visible minority children internalize negative images of their race, may be the fact that these participants reside in an extremely racially dissonant social environment, in which their difference is more highlighted than in situations where there is a larger black population. Therefore, participants may be forced to deal with issues of racial difference at a very young age. Also, parents may have to socialize their children to deal with issues of racial intolerance at a younger age than in other situations. One of the coping mechanisms that minority parents provide for their
child is pride in one's racial heritage. This contention is supported by other theoretical positions and research findings which suggest that discrimination based on ethnic differences can lead to increased identification with the positive aspects of one's own racial group (hooks, 1989; Rosenthal et al., 1989).

Another factor which may contribute to the existence of a positive sense of self-esteem in black youth, even when existing in a racially dissonant social environment, is the development of subgroups which become the primary reference group for the youth. According to Arnez (1972):

...self-perception is not dependent upon the values of the total society but upon a person's evaluation of his performance in terms of role expectations and the "significant others" in his life. These significant others are considered to be persons with whom he interacts and those who have the greatest direct social control over him such as members of his primary reference group (p. 96).

Harper (1977) also recognized the development of subcultures amongst black youth, particularly within the school setting:

Wherein the traditional school system fails to maintain the interest and satisfy the needs of the Black students, the student tends to seek an alternative curriculum in the form of his own culture in moving towards satisfying his need for esteem among his peers. Such a black peer group might set up a curriculum within the traditional school curriculum that helps it to tolerate school and win esteem among peers, but, at the same time, it handicaps Black student in being able to succeed in another world outside their immediate culture. (p. 135).
Participants operate in both a racially dissonant environment in the larger community and a racially consonant environment within the family setting and amongst black friends. The development of positive or negative self-esteem is influenced by the relative weight of these co-existing environments on the individual's life. Turning to the racially consonant micro-environment as the primary reference group is likely to lead to a more positive sense of self-esteem as the individual's black identity is acknowledged, affirmed, and celebrated within that context. Conversely, relying on the racially dissonant macro-environment as the primary group of reference is likely to lead to a sense of isolation, as the black identity is not reflected and rarely acknowledged. This in turn, may lead to feelings of negative self esteem, if a racially consonant subculture within the larger environment is not established. That said, it can not be assumed that black individuals do not get some positive feedback from the larger environment, even though it is racially dissonant. Racial identity is only one dimension of an individual's overall identity (Banks, 1993; McCarthy, 1990; Peshkin, 1991, Rosenthal et al., 1989). Therefore, other parts of the identity system may be affirmed in the larger environment. It is also possible that other parts of the identity system are not affirmed in the family or the black community. These contentions are supported by Helms (1989) argument that although individuals exist in many environments, these environments differ in the degree of impact on racial identity development.

Network #2

The relationship between parental connection and racial identity is illustrated in network #2.
strong parental connection ↔ strong sense of racial identity
black youth
weak parental connection ↔ weak sense of racial identity

Research findings do suggest a correlation between individuals' racial identity development and their relationship to their parents. For black youth, a strong, positive, parental connection leads to a strong racial identity, while a weak or negative parental connection leads to a weakened sense of identity. The majority of participants stated that they have a strong, positive, relationship with their parents. These participants also appear to have a strong racial identity. There were, however, some participants who stated that they are not very close to their parents or that they consider the relationship to be quite negative. Interestingly, these few participants would also fit into the first identity development phase of unexamined identity discussed earlier.

Research findings indicate that the micro-environment or racially consonant environment (family, relatives, black peers) has major impact on participants' sense of identity and self-esteem. In fact, participants reported that the influence of family was much greater than the influence of the school environment or the larger community. This finding is consistent with other research that has found the role of parents to be paramount in the lives of youth. This research is outlined in the next section.

In their study of parent-peer orientation, Cindio, et al. (1983) found the variable of race to be the greatest predictor of adolescents' stronger orientation towards parents or peers. "Specifically, blacks tended to be more parent oriented than whites" (Cindio, et al., 1983,
Rosenberg (McCready, 1989) concluded that across categories of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, the mother was considered to be the most highly significant individual in a youth's environment, followed by the father and the siblings. Giordano, Cernkovich, and Demaris (1993) found that in adolescence, the pattern of distancing from parents and the family unit noted in the experiences of white youth is not generally evident with black youth. They stated that "...as visible minorities within an often hostile majority environment, black youth may see their families as a particular important 'safe haven' or anchor." (Giordano, et al., 1993. P.280). The identified roles that parents play include the provision of discipline, support, control, involvement and participation, and, acceptance (Kawash and Clewes, 1986, McCready, 1989; Metha & Neilson, 1994).

The network outlined is likely manifest because youth that are strongly connected to their parents discuss issues of race. Parents may talk about racism and oppression in the historical context— instilling pride in their children through discussion of what the black race have survived and overcome. They may also allude to their own experiences of racism, and share coping strategies. Conversely, youth who are weakly or negatively connected to their parents may not receive the same sort of socialization, or they may choose to distance themselves from anything their parents represent, including their black racial identity. This assertion is supported by Demo and Hughes (1990) argument that "...parental messages concerning the meaning of being black are important in shaping racial identity" (p. 364).
Research findings indicate a correlation between gender of participant, participants who want to move to a racially consonant macro-environment and participants who prefer not to marry interracially. Network #3, presented below, illustrates the hypothesized relationship between variables.

### Network #3

**Male**
- Primary reference group: Black male peers, family
- Identity affirmed by: Black male peers, family
- Remaining in environment: Black male peers, family
- Open to interracial dating and marriage

**Female**
- Primary reference group: Black female peers, Black male peers
- Identity only partially affirmed by: Black male peers
- Seeks affirmation through relocation to racially consonant environment and through connection to a black partner

Though the pattern of identity awareness and development outlined previously, was prevalent amongst the participants in this study, some gender-based differences were found. Based on participant reports, it seems that in the environment in which these black youth are raised, black males receive a greater degree of affirmation of their social identities than black females. This is exhibited through a more varied selection of dating partners, and the observation that peers of other races copy black males in terms of speech, dress, musical choices, etc.

These findings of gender-based differences are supported by a number of theorists and researchers. Aries and Moorehead (1989) concluded that, in general, adolescent females and males struggle in different ideological areas. For females, their struggles tend to be in
the sexual - interpersonal area, while males struggle in the areas of occupation, politics, and religion. In their article, Verna and Runion (1985) presented a study which concluded that in integrated environments black boys tend to be more popular than black girls.

In his study of black youth raised in predominantly white suburbs, cited earlier, Banks (1984) stated that "...several findings in this study suggest that the experiences of Black females in predominantly White suburban communities may be more difficult than those of Black male " (p.16).

The research found that most male participants have no plans to leave the local community as they grow into adulthood. However, a significant number of female participants plan to move to communities which are either predominantly black, or have a large black population. This observation ties into the facts that the micro-environments of the black female tend to be even more voluntarily restricted to peers of their own race than for the black male. Additionally, female participants showed a distinct preference for intimate relationships with black males versus males of other racial groups. At the same time, they find themselves in competition with females of other races for black male companionship within a population where the black male presence is quite limited. Similar findings in regards to the dating patterns of black male and female adolescents was reported in Peshkin's (1991) study.

Though the male participants also spoke of increasing friendships with other black youth, they were more likely to also retain close friends of other racial groups. And further, male participants tended to express a greater comfort level with dating interracial.
It has been argued that gender differences in the dating and marriage patterns of black youth are connected to the relative position of black males and black females in the social stratification system (hooks, 1981). For example, hooks (1981) argues that in relation to the dominant culture within American society, the white male is at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by the white female, black male, and finally the black female. In terms of interracial relationships, a union of black male and white female does not affect the existing power structure as they are both in powerless positions. Though the black male may consider their power to be enhanced by their connection to the white female, the white female is in fact only in a position of power when connected to the dominant white male. However, the union of a white male and a black female does challenge the social stratification system as it threatens the 'existing white patriarchal rule'. Therefore we are less likely to see unions between white males and black females that between black males and white females.

Black feminist writers (Butler, 1993; hooks, 1981) have also stated that the ideals of beauty that individuals are socialized into are not inclusive of the black female image. This lack of affirmation at the larger societal level impacts the black female adolescents' views of self, their views of white females, and their interaction with black males and males of other races.

It is well known, for example, that ideals of beauty in the United States are based on the blond, blue-eyed model. Dialogue about the reactions to that model in the experience of women of colour, both within their ethnic groups and they relate to White women, ultimately reveals that Black women often judge themselves by that model of
beauty. White women also serve simultaneously as reminders or representatives of that ideal to women of colour and, most frequently, to themselves as failures to meet the ideal... White women function both as women who share certain similar experiences with women of colour and as oppressors of women of colour (Butler, 1993. p.151).

In addition to the fact that many black females do not receive social affirmation from significant members of their primary reference group—black males—they may also tend to be less inclined to marry interracially because of the message they receive within the family and black community that females are responsible for the preservation of the race and culture. This contention is supported by the fact that in this study the majority of females stated that they were extremely close to their extended families, while only two males made similar comments. A recent conversation with an inspector within a local police department also confirmed this point. The inspector stated that in his experience, when he has occasion the meet with 'leaders' within the black community, the majority of these 'leaders' are female.

Another interesting and plausible explanation of the gender-based difference was raised by an adult black male friend during informal discussion. This friend noted that through his personal experiences and observations he's noticed black males seem to develop a social subculture in which they are at the top of the social hierarchy. The status that they have within this subculture may compensate for their lack of status within the larger society, as this subculture is a much more important reference group for them than society in general. This type of subculture compensation has not been similarly noted for black females. They may belong to a subculture which revolves around the black male, but their
they often do not achieve even the status of the non-black female within this subculture.

As this notion was put forward when I was well into the data analysis stage and not during the interview stage, I was unable to confirm this possible explanation with participants. It does generate further questions however. For example, if these subcultures do exist, are they racially mixed groups? And, do they develop around particular activities such as athletics or music?

Network #4

Network #4 illustrates the possible connection between locus of control, which is a part of the identity variable, and other variables within the conceptual framework.

Network #4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>external locus of control</th>
<th>positive self-esteem</th>
<th>coping strategies</th>
<th>(&quot;It's not my fault.&quot;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>negative experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(- insights shared by parents in regards systemic racism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or systemic barrier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- how to achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal locus of control</td>
<td>negative self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>despite the challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(&quot;I have failed.&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Locus of control orientation is a significant construct in participants' lives. There are important ramifications for either a strong internal orientation or as strong external orientation for black youth. The findings of this investigation suggest differing degrees of understanding amongst participants in regard to the recognition of systemic challenges and barriers to future goals. Most participants seemed to understand racism on the interpersonal level, but only a few recognized the issue of racism on the systemic level. This could lead to a great deal of difficulty for those individuals who have a strong internal
This could lead to a great deal of difficulty for those individuals who have a strong internal locus of control orientation, as they will attempt to achieve their goals on the principle of meritocracy which does not always apply in their case. They may blame themselves for not trying hard enough to attain the goal, when in fact the real problem is societally imposed barriers based on race or gender. Those participants with a strong internal locus of control orientation exhibit a stronger sense of personal motivation. This was illustrated by participants who, when discussing their futures, stated that race would not be an issue along as they worked hard, and proved their abilities.

Other researchers have found blacks to show higher senses of external locus of control than whites (Gaa, Williams, & Johnson, 1981). Some researchers argue that a strong sense of external locus of control in black youth is a positive attribute, as the recognition of systemic barriers and high aspirations can co-exist within these individuals (Cindio, et al., 1983). However, it is my contention that if the black youth's locus of control is external, they may be in danger of blaming all failures on societal barriers due to race, rather than on a lack of personal initiative. A strong external locus of control can lead to a lack of motivation. This is illustrated by the statements made by 17 year old David, when he said that he didn't feel empowered to deal with the injustices he faced. He reconciled himself to the fact that he's "living in the white man's world." However, an external locus of control position may serve to protect the individual from a sense of negative self-esteem, as lack of achievement in society is not viewed as personal failure.

The responses of some participants indicate that an individual can exhibit both internal and external locus of control orientations. For example 18 year old Candace made this
comment in regard to the comparative situation between herself and members of the dominant racial group in relation to systemic racism in Canadian society: "But they can believe it because it's working to their benefit so they don't have to see it any other way, you know. Whereas me, I have to see it another way because it's not working for my benefit, maybe if it was, I wouldn't see it either." In the same interview Candace also stated that "whatever you have in store for you, whether it's good or whether it's bad, it's not just God up there or whoever deciding this. It's you, you know....you decide your fate, not any God. You're responsible for yourself."

Candace's sentiments in regard to systemic racism was echoed in an article by Peggy McIntosh (1988). MacIntosh writes from the perspective of a white female examining the interrelationship between the interlocking hierarchies in society, with a particular focus on race and gender. MacIntosh contends that whites are taught to see their life as being the norm or average. They are not cognizant of their 'white privilege' or unearned advantages. In discussing these privileges, MacIntosh stated:

...some privileges make me feel at home in the world. Others allow me to escape penalties or dangers which others suffer. Through some, I escape fear, anxiety, or a sense of not being welcome or not being real. Some keep me from having to hide, to be in disguise, to feel sick or crazy, to negotiate each transaction from the position of being an outsider or , within my group, a person who is suspected of having too close links with the dominant culture. Most keep me from having to be angry (MacIntosh, 1988, p. 11).

MacIntosh's statement points out the probability that, in terms of issues of locus of
as relevant for individuals in the dominant racial group as it is for members of minority racial groups.

Comments made by Angela in her interview illustrate MacIntosh's point further. In one section of her interview, Angela spoke of her first encounter with her best friend, when they met in kindergarten. When Angela's friend, a white girl, described Angela to her mother she did not use Angela's race as a descriptor. She later explained that she did not mention race because she didn't notice the difference. Conversely, when in the interview, Angela spoke of her own awareness of racial issues, she stated that she's always been aware because her parents discussed the issues with her even as a very young child. In fact, when she was young her parents often held groups in their home with other black university students to discuss issues of race. Angela's parents included her in these sessions. Angela's experiences illustrate difference in the socialization of black and white youth. It also relates to Candace's observations that people of the dominant racial group do not have to recognize differences while people of minority racial groups do.

During the research investigation, there were two examples of how black youth and their parents are attempting to find balance between the need for a sense of internal and external locus of control. The first example is a discussion that the researcher had with the mother of 17 year old Angela. Angela had been having a very difficult time securing a part-time job, even though she was eminently qualified for the positions she was applying for. Angela's mother was quite convinced that racism was playing a role in her daughter's lack of success. She was reluctant to share her concerns with Angela, as she did not want the issue of racism to decrease Angela's motivation. At the same time, she recognized that
Angela was becoming very frustrated, and losing confidence in her abilities because she was starting to believe that her inability to secure a job was because she lacked the necessary qualifications.

The second example arose in an interview discussion with 17 year old Christopher. Christopher related his experience in the previous summer when he was seeking part-time employment. At the time, he wore his hair in a large Afro style. He viewed the Afro as being an expression of his black identity and his non-conformity to dominant cultural values. His application for employment at a sporting goods store was denied. However, approximately one month later he entered the store and was offered the job immediately. Christopher viewed this positive reception by these potential employers to be connected to the fact that he no longer was wearing the Afro style. He felt affronted and turned down the employment offer. This example illustrates Christopher's attempt to manoeuvre through locus of control issues. On the one hand, he was exhibiting a sense of external locus of control in the perception that he was refused employment based on his appearance rather than on his ability. On the other hand, he increases his sense of internal locus of control by refusing to take a job that he feels is an affront to his black identity. The fact that he was in a position of choice, controlling his own destiny, so to speak, increased his sense of internal locus of control. However, he was still without a job.

These examples illustrate a significant dilemma that all visible minority individuals must deal with—How much of one's racial/ethnic identity must an individual be willing to suppress in order to be successful in the larger society? Other research has found that ethnic group status alone does not determine locus of control orientation. Rather, it is the
ethnic group status alone does not determine locus of control orientation. Rather, it is the interaction of ethnic group status and social class that is likely to influence the individual's sense of locus of control (Gaa, et al., 1981).

In the following four subsections I will examine the variables of racial/cultural identity, coping strategies, influence of immigration, and socioeconomic status individually. Though a part of overall identity variable, racial/cultural identity is reviewed separately here as the findings of this research suggest that it is an extremely important aspect of the identity development process of the black youth interviewed. The coping strategy variable is also examined independently for a similar reason. Research findings suggest that coping strategies are the mediating variable between the identity variable and all other variables. And finally, the variables of the influence of immigration and socioeconomic status are discussed as being serendipitous findings in this study. The importance of these variables in the identity formation process of participants had not been hypothesized by myself at the onset of this investigation.

**Racial/Cultural Identity**

Participant's responses indicate a strong sense of responsibility to present their race positively. For these youth, their collective black identity is a very important part of their identity system. In fact, while their racial identity was discussed by all youth, with an accompanying sense of pride, only a few participants discussed their cultural identities as West Indians in any detail.

Many participants expressed concern that the local black community was having a difficult time in becoming a cohesive unit. They did not connect their concern to the fact
values and beliefs represented. We are not a homogeneous subculture of the larger community. Only a portion of the black community is of West Indian heritage. A possible explanation for the weaker cultural identity of participants may be the relatively small population of blacks in the greater Vancouver area. An identity which focuses on the black race rather than culture expands the pool of individuals which becomes a part of the individual's primary reference group and racially consonant social micro-environment.

Additionally, participants may have a stronger connection to their racial identity rather than their cultural identity because they face discrimination based on skin colour rather than on their West Indian cultural heritage. Therefore, they are likely to feel a certain kinship with all who have been historically discriminated against and oppressed, and continue to be discriminated against and oppressed because of their black skin. It is a connection based on shared experience.

Coping Strategies

It was hypothesised by the researcher that both positive and negative coping strategies would be identified by participants during the study. Positive coping strategies include: -seeking support from parents, teachers, peers, counsellors; openly expressing feelings about issues of self-image and racism; and, exploring the historical and contemporary black experience in North America on one's own initiative. The study found that these coping strategies were identified by participants as being significant, with the exception of the support role of educators and counsellors. In general, they were not identified as being a part of the youths' support system. Parents, family, and peers provide the greatest support.
The findings of this research suggest that the age and gender of participants influence the types of coping strategies used. For example, younger children tend to rely mainly on family as their support system, while adolescents are more likely to expand their support system to include peers, black peers in particular. Additionally, even in adolescence, female coping mechanisms seem to be much more family-based while the male coping mechanisms include greater peer support.

Participants also identified coping strategies that I did not anticipate at the onset of the investigation. Those strategies include the conscious practice of tolerance, and religious beliefs. Participants described tolerance as a coping strategy from two perspectives. First of all, there was the recognition that their world view was not necessarily the world view of others around them. Therefore a part of participants coping mechanism is their ability to accept the world view of others as being as valid as their own. Second, participants described tolerance as the development of resilience in difficult situations. They cope by developing 'thick skins' that do not allow negative experiences to impact at a very personal, deep, level.

Some participants stated that their religious orientation was important to them as it provided consistency in the midst of change, while other participants stated that their religious orientation assisted in the development of resiliency.

Negative coping strategies were hypothesized to include: voluntary isolation in order to avoid confrontation, suppression of feelings in regards to racial issues, and, depression. Based on participant responses, the negative coping strategies hypothesized are not generally manifest within these black youths' experiences. Participants do speak of feelings
of isolation, however, the isolation they speak of is not self-imposed or voluntary. It is conceivable that there may have been some suppression of feelings as indicated by comments such as "I don't think about racial issues." However, this is only conjecture on my part. The comments may also have been a function of individuals' stage of racial identity development. Comments, such as the one illustrated above, were made by younger participants (13 and 14 year olds) who may not have yet moved into encounter phase of racial/ethnic identity development as yet.

Another possible coping strategy, not specifically referred to by participants, is that of attempting to be as compliant or non-confrontational as possible in order to decrease the black youth's 'visibility' in the environment. This suggestion is made due to the fact that, in their self-descriptions, most participants used the phrase "easy to get along with". If participants have been exposed in their childhood to a degree of negative attention in the school system or larger environment, which they perceive to be due to race, it is possible that they have come to believe that by "not making waves" they are decreasing their visibility and the potential to be targeted.

Coping strategies were also hypothesized to be impacted by the age and gender of participants as well as the racial mix of the school environment. Research results indicate that the variables of age and gender are significant in understanding the types of coping mechanisms that are likely to be in operation. In childhood, participants rely almost exclusively on family, parents in particular. In adolescence, perhaps due to increased contact with other black youth, participants expand their support system to include black peers. In terms of the gender variable, adolescent black males seem to become more
greatly involved in subculture peer group for support, while black females seem to continue to rely almost exclusively on parents, family, and a few close friends.

The variable of consonant or dissonant racial environment, in relation to other variables, is likely to play a strong role in the identity development of black youth. However, within this study, all of the participants interviewed reside and are educated in racially dissonant social environments. Therefore, remarks can not be made as to the extent to which the racial mix of the school environment and larger environment impact the coping strategies utilized by black youth on the basis of this study.

It was further hypothesized that coping strategies would impact the values conflict resolution between majority and minority group values. Researchers have pointed out that the exposure to at least two differing value systems, and some form of confrontation in which the adolescent must make decisions in regards to their degree of inclusion or exclusion of these value systems into their identities, is a part of the process of black identity development in late adolescence and early adulthood (Aries & Moorehead, 1989; Parham, 1989). Based on participant responses, the issue of values conflict has not been a major theme in the lives of participants thus far. Participants did not report that they experienced any significant degree of conflict between their cultural values and the values of the dominant group. They feel quite comfortable interacting within both value systems.

Perhaps, as Parham suggests, it will become a greater issue as they move into adulthood. Alternatively, this finding could be related to Peshkin's and White's (1990) contention that black youth develop 'situational ethnicity'. They are able to call upon different selves to interact effectively in a given environment. The self that is manifest while interacting in
the racially dissonant environment is different than the self that is manifest while in the racially consonant environment.

**Influence of Immigration**

The research indicates that for the group of youth interviewed, the recent history of immigration within their family—within one generation—was a much stronger factor in their identity development than I anticipated. It was felt at the beginning of the research that including children who had themselves emigrated to Canada would complicate the research as it would be difficult to ascertain which findings were based on the participants' visible minority status as opposed to those findings based on the participants' immigrant status. It would appear that even as second generation Canadians, the immigrant experience is a strong influence. This is mainly because as first generation Canadians, the parents of these participants strive to instill in their children the need for hard work and economic success not only on the basis of their racial status but also because the parents' goal in coming to Canada is to provide increased opportunities for their children (Ogbu, 1978; Waters, 1994).

In reference to the work of Ogbu (1978, 1974), presented earlier in the literature review, many parents, viewing their family's situation in society from the immigrant minority perspective, place a lot of pressure on their children to succeed educationally and professionally. This point was illustrated in the study by the fact that a majority of the participants stated that their parents placed greater expectations on them than did the parents of their friends who were not of West Indian heritage.

At the same time, some of the children view their situation in society from the caste
minority perspective (Ogbu, 1978, 1974). They spoke of the difficulties of living and succeeding in a 'white man's world', and their inability to impact and change the systemic racism which exists in the society. These statements indicate the sense of vulnerability and powerlessness that some black youth feel. Additionally, some youth believe that their parents can not totally understand and assist them with these issues because the parents were raised in communities where the dominant racial/cultural group matched their own. They did not experience the degree of discrimination that their children now face.

Participants' observations are supported by Model's (1991) statement that, "...the West Indies offer blacks a less discriminatory environment in which to pursue educational and occupational goals " (p.250).

It is my contention that the existence of these two points of view—the immigrant minority perspective and the caste minority perspective—within the same family system, can be the cause of much tension and a possible mental health issue for both parents and youth.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Other research (Model, 1991) suggests a relationship between immigrant status and socioeconomic class, as a large portion of West Indians who emigrate are skilled tradespersons or professionals. This finding held true of the parents of these participants. Therefore, the socioeconomic background of the youths' families may be an additional factor in identity development. Research (Demo & Hughes, 1990) suggests that socioeconomic status impacts the choices available to black families in terms of the environment they choose to raise their children in and the coping strategies that parents
stress when socializing children.

Smith (1989) also highlighted the importance of social class in relation to identity development. According to Smith, "...social class differentiates people within racial groups. Thus, identity development might be different for members of the Black underclass than for members of the Black middle class or the Black upper class." (1989, p.280). However Ogbu (1978) cautions that "Where caste and class systems coexist...the basic principle of social structure is the caste system. Class is secondary to the named black and white castes, which are publicly recognized and clearly bounded groups " ( p. 103).

Much of the research in the area of self-esteem and self-concept in black youth has examined issues of educational achievement or lack of school completion and poverty. The focus has mainly been on children of lower income families (e.g. Barnes & Farrier, 1985; Dei, 1996). It is difficult to form any conclusions in regards to the impact of socioeconomic status on racial identity development on the basis of the findings of this research, or to attempt to generalized the findings to other settings, as the participants in this study were generally of the same socioeconomic category—middle class.

The finding of this research, with respect to the relationship between variables, suggest that the visible minority status of the black youth did not directly impact identity development, as was hypothesized to be the case. The impact of visible minority status is mediated by age—as the individual moves from childhood to adulthood their commitment to black identity increases; the racial mix of the school population—when there are more black students participants feel less isolated and more comfortable in the environment;
coping strategies—a strong connection to parents and black peers instill a sense of racial pride; and gender—black females seem to find less social affirmation of their identities than do black males in this environment.

The findings of this research also suggest that there is a direct relationship between coping strategies and racial/ethnic identity development, rather than the indirect relationship that was originally hypothesized. It would appear that coping strategies mediate between variables such as age, gender, visible minority status, and degree of racial consonance or dissonance in the macro-environment, and racial/ethnic identity development. It is the combination of variables, filtered through the individual's mechanisms for coping that influence identity development of black youth in racially dissonant social environments rather than any single variable impact.

The conceptual framework on the next page illustrates the relationship between variables suggested by the research results.
**Conceptual Framework #2**

**Relationship Between Variables As Indicated By Research Results**

- **Identity**
  - self-concept
  - self-esteem
  - locus of control
  - self-awareness

- **Coping Strategies**
  - support system
  - based on relationship with parents, family, and peers
  - expression of feelings about issues
  - investigating issues on own initiative and/or with the assistance of others
  - suppression of feelings in regards to racial issues (?)

- **Visible Minority Status**
- **Age**
  - childhood
  - adolescence

- **Gender**

- **Immigrant Status**

- **Socioeconomic Status**
- **Consonant or Dissonant Racial Environment**
  - racial mix of school and community population
Recommendations: The Educational System

The implications of this research for the educational system will now be considered. I have chosen to highlight implications, and provide recommendations, for the educational system rather than black community organizations or families for two reasons. First of all, of the three areas stated, issues within the educational system were the major focus of participants' discussions. Secondly, it is vital that the formalized institutions of society acknowledge and provide for the needs of all students.

Major changes must be undertaken within the educational system in order to meet the needs of visible minority students (Banks & Banks, 1995; Banks, 1993, Gay, 1993, Ogbu, 1978). The educational system must provide greater recognition of the process of ethnic identity formation in visible minority youth and be cognisant of its role in supporting young people during possibly traumatic developmental stages. There is also the need for a greater understanding of issues of race and racism, from an historical perspective as well as its impact on contemporary society. The educational system has a responsibility to assist students to recognize and develop their roles as social change agents in a society full of inequalities. "The educational failure of minority students is a function of the extent to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society "(Cummins, 1986, p.32).

The issues to be discussed in the following subsections include; "voluntary" segregation among students, the role of counsellors and teachers, and curricular reform.
'Voluntary' Segregation Among Students

In examining issues of student interaction within the school, school personnel must take into consideration, why segregation between various racial and ethnic groups may be occurring. If educators are uncomfortable with forms of voluntary segregation by students, they should explore the reasons for their discomfort. It is likely that some teachers have an ethnocentric mind-set, as teachers do not leave their cultures behind when they enter the school premises (Gay, 1993; Ogbu, 1978). If this is the case, teachers may not feel comfortable in working with students who are not exhibiting the same cultural norms and practices as their own. Additionally, if the job of education is to reinforce dominant culture values as Ogbu (1978) contends, a racially or ethnically segregated environment would be detrimental to that work. Possibly when teachers encounter such an environment they may, on some level, feel they are not doing their job.

An important issue for school personnel to explore is the isolation that racial/ethnic minority students experience in the school environment. As these students rarely see their identity reflected in the school culture, curriculum or personnel, they may group together as a form of affirmation of self—a means of protecting themselves from being overtaken by the dominant culture identity which is reinforced and promoted in school. For the participants in this study, not only do they feel isolated within the school, they also do not have a very established black community in the area to turn to for support. Separatist actions of racial/ethnic minority youth can be viewed as being a coping strategy, cultural survival technique and support system.

While educators are developing techniques for increasing the integrated activities of
students of all backgrounds, represented within the school, they must consider the possible negative impact these measures will have on visible minority students. If the students' coping mechanisms and survival techniques are not available to them what will they be replaced with? How are students to deal with racism and isolation in the school system?

Mandatory integration measures alone are not likely to be successful. The entire school system, formal and informal curriculum, teacher training, representative staffing levels, etc., must change to reflect the plurality of cultures and perspectives in society, in order to see positive change in student interaction across racial and ethnic lines.

The Role of Teachers and Counsellors

The findings of this study suggest that, in order to meet the needs of racial/ethnic minority youth within the school setting, educators must develop an understanding of the process of ethnic identity development as it may apply to their students. As stated earlier, most participants seem to be either in or entering the immersion stage of racial identity development. They are likely to be experiencing some form of anger or resentment towards the dominant racial or cultural group. These feelings may be expressed behaviourally, emotionally, or academically within the school setting. However, the racial/ethnic minority youth may experience some difficulty in sharing their issues with teachers and counsellors, particularly if these educators are viewed as being representatives of the dominant cultural group.

Most participants in the study stated that in the school system they turned to their friendship circle for support. They are not comfortable in discussing issues with teachers and counsellors because they are not confident that these educators understand issues
pertinent to black youth. Therefore, educators and counsellors may have to initiate interaction with students in order to demonstrate that they are sensitive to their needs. Though this process, students may develop a more trusting relationship with school personnel.

And finally, as the study has found that the participants turn to their parents and family as their major source of support, it is important that educators, parents, and other significant family members work collaboratively in order to ensure that the educational experiences of these students are positive and successful.

Curricular Reform

Curricular reform involves the presentation of a minority culture's history, and experiences in a society from its own perspective, not once again, through the interpretation of knowledge and information by representatives of the dominant cultural group. This serves to increase the relevancy of the material to the minority student (Banks, 1993; Kohn, 1994). According to Griffiths (1993):

...the curriculum decisions that the school takes will affect children's self-esteem and their achievements simultaneously. If the decisions are not taken sensitively, children are sometimes going to be asked to choose between valuing the part of themselves which is, implicitly, excluded from a subject in the curriculum, or valuing the part of themselves which likes to learn that subject. They will have to make decisions about what to try and achieve and what kind of self to be at the same time. (p. 313.)

Comments made by participants in this investigation begs the question—What image is projected to students and society at large when blacks are mainly discussed in the context
of being 'slaves' and 'niggers'? What image is projected when blacks are not presented as a people who have survived and overcome barriers and oppression and have contributed to the development of this society despite their hardships? It is highly likely that this unbalanced representation leads to a negatively skewed perception of black people. Students of all racial and cultural heritages need to be provided with factual information in regard to the roles that various groups have played in the development of this society. This increased understanding will assist students in valuing their own heritage as well as the heritage of others, rather than leading them to assume, incorrectly, that they do not have a legitimate place in Canadian society because their people did not contribute to its development.

Peshkin (1992) conducted a study in a community in California in which he examined the ethnic relations between students and the students' experiences in schools. His findings in regard to the black students' view of curriculum echo statements made by participants in this investigation. In reference to black students, Peshkin stated:

They object to history that is written and taught as if blacks deserve mention only as slaves brought from Africa, as a factor in the Civil War, as initiators of the 1960s civil rights movement, and as all star professional athletes (1991, p. 57).

Peshkin also stated the black students' preference for "instruction that shows blacks as co-builders of America" (1991, p.57).

Curricular reform is important not only for the identity development of racial/ethnic minority students, but also for the identity development of students who are members of the dominant racial/ethnic group. Curriculum which reflects the plurality of cultures and
perspectives in a society assists students in developing world views which are not ethnocentric. "Non-White minorities are forced to become biethnic to some extent in order to experience social and economic mobility. However, members of dominant groups, can and often do live almost exclusive monocultural and highly ethnocentric lives" (Banks, 1981, p. 132). Current curriculum, which is generally from a Eurocentric perspective, reinforces the notion of racial/ethnic superiority and entitlement for some, and racial/ethnic inferiority and powerlessness for others (Banks, 1981; MacIntosh, 1988).

Racial/ethnic minority students need to feel a sense of safety and acceptance in the school environment. Once the sense of safety, acceptance, and affirmation is increased, the sense of isolation will decrease, and voluntary integration amongst students of various racial/ethnic backgrounds is more likely to increase as well. School reform alone can not provide the changes necessary within the school system. "Legislative and policy reforms may be necessary conditions for effective change, but they are not sufficient. Implementation of change is dependent up the extent to which educators, both collectively and individually, redefine their roles with respect to minority students and communities" (Cummins, 1986, p.18).

In order for change in any aspect of the educational system to be effective, educators must include parents, and community in the change process. The findings of this investigation very clearly point out the tremendous influence of parents, family, and black peers in the lives of black youth. These are their significant others—their motivators and their support systems. Collaborative efforts with parents and community greatly increases
the probability that changes within the educational system will lead to a more positive schooling experience for black youth (Cummins, 1986).

It is important to acknowledge however, that the rapidly changing demographics in Canadian society will continue to provide substantial challenges to the school system.

Summary

To conclude this thesis, the research questions posed at the beginning of the investigation will be reviewed and responded to here. The research questions were:

1) What experiences related to the racial/ethnic group membership of this group of black adolescents, during the developmental years, could be said to characterize the group, and how did these experiences impact the development of self-concept and self esteem?

   - What type of experiences?
     ( positive and/or negative)

   - Is the impact of these experiences felt during childhood, adolescence, or both?

   - What effect do these experiences have on the individual's developing self-concept and self-esteem?

2) What coping strategies does the individual use to deal with their unique experiences?

   - Do they discuss issues with teachers, counsellors, parents and/or peers?

   - What is the response from the individuals they confide in?

   - How could others be more helpful to them?

3) Does having a significant percentage of other individuals of the same racial heritage in the immediate surroundings make a difference (beneficial/detrimental)?

Research findings of this study suggest that middle class black youth, residing in
suburban communities, where they are present in very small numbers, do encounter common experiences based on these circumstances. Furthermore, it would seem that these black youth, in situations where the black population is small, also have to deal with conditions not faced by visible minority youth in an environment with larger populations of members of their racial/ethnic group. Experiences identified in this study include: a profound sense of isolation; a reduced sense of social affirmation as racial/ethnic identity is rarely positively affirmed in larger society; and, socialization by parents at a very young age to assist their children in coping with the discrimination and lack of affirmation they encounter in the larger society.

The research found that the most important factor in determining these black youths' overall racial identity, and specifically issues of self-concept and self-esteem, was the relationship of the individual and their parents. A strong relationship with parents can lead to a positive sense of self and pride in one's racial heritage.

The impact of these youths' experiences is felt during both childhood and adolescence, though the sense of isolation appears to be greater during the childhood years. Additionally, the adolescents interviewed reported having a more expansive support system and other coping mechanisms at their disposal than did the children. Support for children centred around their family while adolescents' support system included their peer group. This was particularly the case for the male adolescents interviewed.

It was also found that the support provided by family is of a different nature than the support provided by peers. The family provides the tools to navigate the environment. They prepare their children for the challenges they will face in the larger environment.
through very specific messages. The messages are about being proud of their racial heritage rather than feeling sorry for themselves. However, they are also told that they must face the reality that their environment will likely be more challenging for themselves than for most others. For example, one of the parental messages often quoted by participants was that black youth can not succeed in society by doing just as well as other youth. They must work harder to achieve the same goals.

Black peers assist the individual through their validation of and empathy for their experiences. Between these black youth there is a shared sense of understanding they do not find elsewhere, not even from their parents. This study also found that, in general, neither children nor adolescents turn to school administrators or educators for support.

At the beginning of this investigation it was hypothesized that the coping strategies used by black youth residing in racially dissonant macro-environments would be a major determinant of the development of positive or negative self-esteem in the youth. This hypothesis was borne out in the study. One of the tasks of the investigation was the identification of the various coping strategies used. Coping strategies of black youth, identified in the study include:

- the establishment and further development of a network of support which includes parents, siblings, extended family, and black peers;

- the development of a strong sense of racial pride and collective identity in spite of negative imagery and stereotyping of the race in the larger society;

- the establishment of subgroups in which they attempt to resist assimilation into dominant culture values by creating their own language or dialect which combines dialects of the Caribbean and black Americans. They also listen mainly to Caribbean and black American music, and emulate black Americans in their style of dress;
the development of the perception of minority status in the society as a positive—they enjoy their unique status; and,

-focusing on areas in their individual experiences in which they excel, such as sports and academics.

In order to further assist black youth residing in racially dissonant environments, efforts should be made to decrease their sense of isolation. Significant adults in these youths lives need to develop an understanding of their experiences as well as of the racial identity development process. Parents, extended family, educators, and organizations within the black community need to facilitate the increased interaction of black youth throughout the area. Within the school system, there needs to be more racial/ethnic identity affirmation within curriculum, and activities around the school. Administrators, educators, and counsellors also need to increase their sensitivity to the issues of black youth in order to become a part of their support system.

This study has only captured a "snapshot" of the identities of these participants in their current life situations. It must be acknowledged that individuals can maintain a number social identities. Multiple social identities enable them to interact effectively in diverse social arenas. Additionally, different aspects of one's overall identity (e.g. race, gender, or class) may be the most salient at a given time. (Banks, 1993; McCarthy, 1990; Peshkin, 1991, Rosenthal et al., 1989). An individual's racial identity may be most salient for those individuals residing in racially dissonant social environments.

It cannot be assumed that identities and senses of self-concept and self-esteem will remain constant into adulthood. Change or stability in an individual's identity is very dependent on how individuals deal with the challenges they will face—how they interpret
challenges and use the skills they have honed in this environment to overcome and achieve in various situations. "The consistency, stability, and clarity of aspects of self-esteem can be expected to vary depending upon situational demands, potency of needs, and availability of resources for coping" (McCreary, 1989, p.582).

Though some participants find their environment challenging at times, they do not want to reside in completely segregated environments. Even those participants who spoke of moving to other communities, want to be in communities with more blacks, not all blacks. We must be concerned however with the number of participants who do not identify with the dominant group at all, as this may be detrimental to their future success.

Society can not place all the responsibility for successful integration on the shoulders of visible minority youth. We can not wait for participants to reach the highest phase in racial identity development, where they are able to "cope with" or "adjust to" the dominant culture. Society has a responsibility to recognize and affirm the identities of minority individuals and the contributions that they make to the society.

Integration results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he has adapted. He has 'adjusted'...The integrated person is person as Subject. In contrast the adaptive person is person as object, adaptation representing at most a weak form of self defence. If man is incapable of changing reality, he adjusts himself instead. Adaptation is behaviour characteristic of the animal
sphere; exhibited by man it is symptomatic of his dehumanization. (Freire, 1973, p.4).
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Where were you born?
Where were your parents born?
What school do you attend?
What grade are you in?
What is the demographic makeup of the school population (teachers/students)?
What kind of employment do your parents have?
How would you describe your family?
What is your relationship like with your parent(s)/sibling(s)?
Who do you feel really close to in your family?
Do you feel that your parents place a lot of expectations on you? If so, what sort of expectations?
Do your friend's parents place a lot of expectations on them?
Do you come from a large extended family?
How do you feel about yourself?
How would you describe yourself to others?
Do you recall a point at which you started thinking about racial issues?
Who do you talk to about racial issues?
How do you feel about people of different racial heritages?
What really makes you feel good?
What sort of things make you sad?
Does religion play a role in your life?
How would you describe your friends?
Do you feel differences when you are out with black peers versus peers of other races?
Are there aspects of your racial heritage that you really like/dislike?
Would you change anything about membership in your racial group if you could?
Do you think your racial heritage will affect your adult life in any particular way? If so, how?
Are you currently dating? Does race play a part in your choices or in the availability of dating partners?
What do you think of the idea of interracial marriages?
Do you have any preferences in terms of marriage partners?
How do you view the black community in the lower mainland?
What is your involvement with the black community?
Are you taught about the history of Canadian blacks in school?
Have you spent time in a community where the majority of people are black?
Do you think that having the minority black experience gives you any special skills for the future?
## APPENDIX B

### CONCEPTUALLY CLUSTERED MATRIX

(sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject #</th>
<th>Consonant Racial Environment</th>
<th>Dissonant Racial Environment</th>
<th>School Environment</th>
<th>Peer Relations</th>
<th>Connection To Racial Community</th>
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## APPENDIX C

### LISTING OF SCHOOLS

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<th>Public High School</th>
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<tr>
<td>West Whalley Junior Secondary</td>
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*Educational Researcher, 15*(9), 12-18.


