PARENTING IN A DIFFERENT SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT: THE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

There is a growing literature on the experiences of immigrant women; however, little attention has been paid to parenting experiences of immigrant women, in particular those of African descent.

The thesis seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how immigrant women of African descent in British Columbia socialize their children, and why they socialize their children in certain ways, given the fact that these mothers have been socialized in a different culture. Furthermore, the thesis attempts to elaborate on the extent to which both the women's original culture and their new culture interact to determine their child rearing practices and perceptions of parenting.

The methodology used is in-depth interviews about the women's African centric and Canadian experiences. Loosely structure, open ended questions focused on topics such as discipline, self esteem, respect, responsibility, racism, safety and the school and parenting resources. The women were encouraged to talk extensively and reflectively about their experiences as mothers.

The results indicate that the task of child rearing for these women is very challenging. The women perceive Canadian cultural values to be more materialistic, individualistic, relaxed and less respectful of elders than African centric cultural values which emphasize the opposite principles. These conflicts, coupled with these mothers' and their children's visible minority status, compels the women to undergo dramatic shifts in their conceptual framework of parenting, and in parenting techniques in an attempt to adapt to Canadian culture. They select and incorporate aspects of both cultures to socialize their children to fit into

Canadian culture, yet retain their African centric self identity, given their visible minority status. These women lack adequate information and resources relevant to the challenges they face on a daily basis. The women also expressed a yearning for recognition and inclusion of their parenting style by mainstream culture.

It is important that immigrant women's experiences be incorporated by the Canadian Ministry of Social Services when planning and facilitating future social services, and that existing services become more sensitive and welcoming to these women's ways of parenting.

Dedication

For my late father Wilfrid

my mother Constance

and my sons

Tsepo and Zakhele

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Experience is the realm where differences and commonalities are worked out. Without hearing women's own account of our perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, all discussions of commonality and difference are abstract, unreal, and unrealized.

Glenda P. Simms, "Foreword"
in *Sharing our Experience*

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

While working on my masters program in Women's Studies, I found, on the one hand, that the course is informative, educative and eye opening, while on the other hand, I have been disappointed by insufficient information about immigrant women, including those of my own heritage, which is African. Exclusion of experiences of this group of women is very evident in the subject of motherhood and parenting, regardless of an increase in research in this area. Boulton (1983:21) has also noticed this lack, particularly in the topics of adaptation, cultural clashes, transitions and services available. The literature which addresses women of African descent tends to represent us as struggling 'poor' victims of white middle class men's patriarchal social structure or as victims of our own spouses. I am not denying or trivializing issues other than parenting

as they form an integral part of our everyday experiences. However, the problem is that they represent one side of ourselves and overshadow the other. Very rarely, or never, are we perceived and portrayed as active, rational or powerful women (let alone mothers) who are very often in control of their personal spheres, especially the home. This practice, so says Humm (1992), is grounded in feminist theory. Criticizing Second Wave Feminism, she points out that although second wave feminists succeeded in developing the themes of 'reproduction', 'experience' and 'difference' as feminist issues, they failed to empower women's reproduction by portraying them as victims of reproduction (53-4).

From my own experience, women of African heritage and children are inseparable beings, even in Canada. Whenever we converse as mothers, our children form an integral part of our conversations. I have encountered a similar experience with many women outside my group, even with some men. I am attempting to demonstrate the point that mothering, rather than wifehood, is "the most important occupation and priority of African women, embedded in the African heritage and philosophy that places special value on children" (Staples, 1988:317). Supporting Staples, Ellis (1986), writing about women of the Caribbean, stresses not only the value of motherhood, but also the respect, influence and authority given to mothers. She reports that as a result, seventy five percent of the women are mothers (9). It is, therefore, crucial that we give the issue of parenting as much recognition as other immigrant women's issues. Based on the above mentioned observations, I

would argue that parenting experiences of immigrant women of African descent constitute great possibilities for research.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

Given the above situation, and the fact that "marginality and racial differences are, among other factors, important in feminist studies," (Nava, 1992:8), the central aim of the thesis is to document parenting experiences of mothers of African descent in British Columbia. My focus is on the women's concrete experiences as they raise their children in a social environment that is different from the one in which they have been raised and socialized. Cross cultural studies on parenting observe the existence of cultural variations in the way in which parents define and practice child rearing (Staples, 1971). I am, therefore, interested in how immigrant mothers of African descent or heritage, given a socialization background different from the Canadian one, perceive, explain and carry out the role of child rearing in Canada. My intention is to document the social and psychological aspects of their parenting; the what, when, how and why of their parenting. I will also discuss the aspect of progression, bringing in issues of "adaptations", "cultural clashes", transitions and services available, as identified as pertinent by Boulton (1983). Finally, I will be looking at the role played by both their pre-Canadian and their Canadian experiences in relation to their parenting activity.

In relation to the change that mothers undergo, I shall draw from the purpose from Warren's research on experiences of immigrants in Canada.

1. to inform and provide understanding "into the attitudinal bridging processes used by the immigrant [mothers] in making, [in particular, parental] transition from the [pre Canadian to the Canadian parenting]"
2. "to identify and describe the effect which the bridging processes have had upon the women's changing concept of self." (Warren, 1986:7).

Research in this area is necessary in order to include and give immigrant women of African heritage more voice within feminism; they "have too often been silenced or not encouraged to speak" (Warren, 1986:1). This opportunity will allow them more representation within feminist discourse. Feminist theory holds that worthwhile research should not only contribute to the women's movement, but have an emancipatory contribution to the women (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991:145). The thesis will also enable them to reach out and bring awareness to the Canadian community at large, particularly to the institutions and organizations responsible for provision of social resources and services related to parenting. Hopefully, such awareness will facilitate attention in this area. In this way, specific parenting problems as experienced by immigrant women of African descent will be addressed. One of the intentions is to use the thesis as a means of support for those women who find themselves in the same situation as my co-researchers. I hope that, as they read the stories of these women, they will be

encouraged to know that they are not alone. I also hope that they might gain useful parenting insights from these women.

Parenting involves caring for both the physical and the psychological aspects of a child (Fantini & Cardenas, 1980:17; Rich, 1986:52; Hammer, 1975:18). Although the two aspects are intertwined, I shall focus on the psychological or socialization aspect for two reasons. First, as reflected through literature on immigrant women I come into contact with on a regular basis find this aspect problematic, as I do myself. Second, as will be demonstrated under the topic 'Literature Review' below, this aspect has been ignored by researchers on issues of motherhood.

In the context of this thesis, this general concept, 'parenting', in general terms refers to those roles which are associated with being a father or a mother (Collins Cobuild Essential English Dictionary). Also, it is used to include the roles which my co-researchers perform, which are 'mothering' and 'socialization'. The concept 'mothering' is used to refer to those activities which are traditionally relegated to mothers. These involve nurturing, protecting and supporting the physical, the spiritual, psychological and the autonomous development of children (Hammer, 1975:18). The concept 'socialization' is used to refer to a process whereby children are taught [through parenting] accepted values, beliefs and behaviors in their development to become autonomous acceptable and responsible adults within the society in which they are members (Boykin and Toms, 1985:33, citing Baldwin 1980 & Young, 1970). For the purpose of the thesis I use the concept 'parenting' to include

also the traditional fathering role, as some of the women, in particular the single mothers, parent alone.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. **Identifying Gaps**

Researchers on immigrant women in Canada have eloquently documented various experiences of immigrant women. Nonetheless, one cannot fail to notice the gap left on the subject of parenting, particularly the area of socialization of children. Existing research on immigrant women tends to emphasize issues related to employment, education, language and spousal abuse. Issues of parenting are usually dominated by daycare issues. Even so they are only discussed to demonstrate the necessity of daycare for the purpose of economic improvement of these women, to give them equal opportunity to men in the public sphere (Estable, 1986; Seward & McDade, 1988; Roberts, 1990). Even where parenting issues are addressed, discussions are not extensive and detailed enough. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (1993) has compiled a collection of stories about experiences of minority and Aboriginal women, among which, fortunately, are parenting experiences. Unfortunately, these stories are limited to relationships between mothers and daughters, a tendency in the literature which has also been noted by Harris (1990). As a result, such research does not provide us with a holistic picture of relationships between mothers and their children. In addition, it

does not address the progression of motherhood for immigrant women.

A similar tendency to exclude immigrant women's parenting experiences is also evident in mainstream research. This research, although it recognizes the impact made by the aspect of change on parenting, tends to contextualize this change vertically (according to social class), and historically within the same cultural environment (Dally, 1976; Eakins, et. al., 1983; Boulton, 1983). The research tends to noticeably overlook horizontal (by location) change experienced by immigrant mothers. Even where such change is documented, it is given little coverage, and does not focus on the daily experiences of these women (Hammer, 1975; Kitzinger, 1978; Chinese Canadian National Council, 1992).

Theories on mothering have a similar tendency. A popular feminist psychoanalyst, Chodorow (1978), attempts to give psychological explanations for why women continue to want to mother. However, she formulates a theory that focuses exclusively on western culture, with explanations and generalizations that are drawn from the experiences of the White North American as a representative of all other people, and totally failing to recognize cultural diversity (Spelman, 1988:85; Boykin & Toms, 1985:34).

This exclusion, which reflects a weakness in feminist theories can be traced back to the tendency of feminist theory to focus heavily on the public sphere (Bernard, 1975:32). Following this focus, feminist researchers on immigrant women's issues overlooked one of the most important roles played by immigrant women, that of reproduction. The fact that the role of child socialization for this

group of women takes place in a strange environment makes their experiences crucial to feminist research.

Exclusion of immigrant women's experiences in this respect poses the danger of grossly under representing, silencing and rendering invisible and unimportant parenting experiences of this group of women. It also goes against revelations by feminist analyses that "there is no unitary family experience for women, [that] no one pattern of life characterizes the experiences of all women" (Baber & Allen, 1992:1).

3.2. **Mothers and Parenting**

That mothers are primary carers of children is a universal reality. "Women, as child bearers, are expected to nurture and take care of the children, but are "assigned almost all responsibility for the children" (Rich, 1986:142). Furthermore,

> "Mothers usually spend most time with children and feel that the final responsibility of somehow producing a socially acceptable, happy and reasonably bright child falls on them." (Kitzinger, 1978:16)

Although research done all over the world in the area of parenting comes to the same conclusion, we should also recognize the important role played by fathers, especially single fathers (Billingsley, 1968:38, 43, 44)). In her study on relationships between mothers and daughters in the USA, Hammer perceives a mother as "the first mediator of the environment for a daughter."

(Hammer, 1975:XIV). Njoku (1980:16), writing about African women, sees the African woman as "the architect of moral and spiritual development." In Ghana, as maintained by Kaye (1962:133), "a universal practice is for the mother to be chiefly responsible for the early care of her children . . ." Even where husbands help with housework, wives still end up doing more work (Boulton, 1983:142; Boudreau et al., 1986). It is not only the biological mother who is responsible for taking care of children. African centric parenting custom demands the participation of other women. The same practice is present in Western culture in the form of child caregivers who are predominantly women. The difference between the two cultures is that whereas in the western culture such mothering is controlled and institutionalized as in daycare centers, in the African centric culture it is spontaneous and informal. This reality, that parenting is an activity which is almost exclusively relegated to women, necessitates more research in this area, especially in relation to immigrant mothers.

3.3. **The Component of Difference**

There is enough evidence that "there is certainly a great contrast between the Western family life and that of most of the rest of the world." (Trebilcot, 1984:235). These differences, which are based on different philosophies, include the family structure, the belief and value system, methods of parenting, and the socialization content. Majors and Billson (1992:55-6, 111), writing about the dilemmas of Black Manhood in the US, came up with some basic philosophical differences between African centric culture and

Western culture. Among these differences are African features of interconnectedness and community, oneness with nature, spirituality and collectivism, where the principle of expressive individualism harmonizes with that of communalism. According to this view, "while possessions belong to the community at large, uniqueness is valued" (111). In contrast, so they maintain, are the Euro-American features of separateness and independence, materialism and individualism, where "possessiveness and individualism [are forced] to live in the same boat" (56).

Myers (1988:188), in her explanation of an "Afrocentric World View", holds the same perspective. She goes further to discuss how this world view prescribes an individual's attainment of self identity and self-knowledge. Underlying this world view is the epistemology that places self-knowledge at the base of all knowledge, and the ontology that argues that 'the process by which we will achieve our goals is through human and spiritual networks" (3). Achievement of this will lead to attainment of "everlasting peace and happiness", the basic purpose of African education. According to an Afrocentric conceptual framework,

> "reality is at once spiritual and material. When the spiritual/material ontology is adhered to, one loses the sense of individualized/material mind and experiences the harmony of the collective identity of being one with the source of all good." (Myers, 1988:12)

The concept of "collective self" facilitates the concept of "extended self", which includes all of nature, the entire community,

the unborn and the ancestors. However, to be recognized and included in the circle of existence, one has to fulfill the requirements- "adoption of the proper consciousness as evidenced through behavior and attitude" (Myers, 1988:12, citing Asante, 1980; Zahan, 1979). This world view places the highest value on "positive interpersonal relationships among humankind" (Myers, 1988:12, citing Nichols, 1976). This world view, has been contaminated by the materialistic world view and by racism and sexism (13).

These philosophies, the Western and The Afrocentric, seem to shape contrasting family structures between the two cultures. The Afrocentric view of interconnectedness and communality seems to relate to the existence of an extended family structure. In contrast, the Euro-American perspective of separateness and independence seems to result in the nuclear family structure. Dodson (1981), studying Black American family patterns not only found a strong existence of extended family (28), but also noted existence of stronger kinship ties and support in "Black families" than in White families (29).

In support of this world view, theories on mothering argue that individual women mother differently depending on the way in which they have been raised; but women from the same cultural, ethnic, regional or racial background will share much in common in the way in which they mother (Collins, 1990:115-137). It is highly probable, then that women who have been socialized in a different culture will find it challenging to raise their children in the Canadian social environment.

3.4. **The Components of 'Immigranthood' and Change**

Another important different characteristic is the immigrant status. The challenges faced by immigrants are described by the following excerpt by one Canadian psychologist who states:

> Every act of immigration is like suffering a brain stroke. One has to learn to walk again, to talk again, to move around the world again, and, probably the most difficult of all, one has to learn to re-establish a sense of community. (Vivian Rakoff, cited by Warren, 1986:7)

As experienced by Adrian Stokes, an English painter and writer, "Living in a new country, may signify a second birth" (Carter, 1992:1).

Whereas all immigrants, regardless of their demographic traits, will go through the process of 'acculturation' (McAdoo, 1993:10, 11, drawing on Kumabe et .al., 1985), it is women who will be hit the hardest. As primary child socializers the process of acculturation will fall more heavily on their shoulders than on any family member. They will be faced with the responsibility of adapting not only for their sakes, but also for the sake of the children they will be socializing. The reality is that "The physical and psychic weight of responsibility on [every] woman with children is by far the heaviest of social burdens" (Rich, 1986:53). Meanwhile, they go through this process as adults who are unfamiliar with the Canadian social structure and environment, carrying with them the values and beliefs with which they have been brought up. Their disadvantaged situation in this regard is further exacerbated by the

fact that their values and beliefs are not only perceived as strange, but also quite often rejected. Warren ascertains:

> Unlike most of us, these women have lived in other countries and have been an integral part of cultures, practices and values unfamiliar to us [Canadians]. As Canadians we are enthusiastic about our country but sometimes are inclined to be too ethnocentric in our culture, our way of doing things are the best. Such a viewpoint blinds us to the real talents, fresh perspectives, and potential contributions of newcomers. (Warren, 1986:1)

Being an immigrant, therefore, is a complicated experience which is often accompanied by drastic changes, within which is an inherent aspect of inevitability in any situation. In relation to immigrant mothers and mothering, such change is complex. Contact with other cultures necessitates changes in both their family pattern and their child rearing methods (Ruddick, 1984:219). Such changes are made more difficult by the fact that change in rearing methods is slow (Bernhard, 1970:10-11) In addition, the process of transition is further complicated by the fact that these women are immigrants in a society which "is changing with an acceleration that is probably unprecedented", where "traditional patterns of child rearing are becoming increasingly difficult to follow and often seem to be no longer relevant, " and in a world which "is less structured and less supportive than formerly" (Dally, 1976:209), "in this day of confused thinking and conflicting standards" (Bernhard, 1970:11). Compounding the whole situation, as already stated, this world conflicts with the 'world' from which my co-reseachers originate.,

which, as will be later demonstrated by their stories, is supportive, having "uniform" standards of beliefs and values. Warren (1986), sees a cross cultural transition, which is necessary for the achievement "of a satisfactory sense of identity" as difficult, as a "grieving process". According to this theory, "the self is a social self, one developed through interaction with others" (8). He maintains, therefore, that since the immigrants' 'others' in a new country differ from those in the old country, "it follows that a sense of self must also be developed" (18). Given this situation, the women will suffer a sense of loss as they go through a bridging process. A bridging process occurs when immigrants integrate in a new culture. This process requires the immigrant to relinquish certain self identifying aspects of the original culture in order to gain a sense of recognition acceptance and community in the new culture. Warren (1986) discusses dynamics of this process.

Moreover, the fact that my co-researchers belong to a visible minority group makes them susceptible to racial discrimination at some time in their lives. Such discrimination includes "exclusion from participation in the life of the society, even in a democracy like Canada" (Krauter & Davis, 1978:1). They also tend "to be a relatively neglected component of the immigration population", not only regarding research, but also policy formulation (Seward & McDade, 1988:1). Moreover, as immigrants, they have "to work harder than non-immigrants in order to achieve equality" (Warren, 1986:15).

4. CONTENT

The preceding chapter adequately demonstrates the necessity of my thesis. In reviewing relevant literature, I have indicated how researchers and theorists about women in general, and about immigrant women in particular, by excluding experiences of African centric women, contributed to marginalization of their parenting experiences. In chapter two I discuss the feminist oral history as a relevant methodology to my research. Chapter three provides us with background information of the women, that is, where they are coming from. It focuses on the women's African centric socialization processes and parenting. This information will later be used is to find connections between the women's past experiences and perspectives on parenting and their present. Chapter four addresses their experiences and perceptions of the Canadian social structure and environment as parents and/or parents to be. It includes experiences from the time they arrived to the day of the research. Chapter five is the conclusion of the research and recommendations, most of which draws from the women's perspectives.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

1. FEMINIST ORAL HISTORY AS RELEVANT METHODOLOGY

Some feminist researchers advocate methodologies which draws from Feminist Standpoint Theory. Such feminist research is in sharp contrast with traditional research methodologies which explains the world from men's point of view. Feminist standpoint theory advocates research that explains reality from the perspective of women (Smith, 1987; hooks, 1988; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Collins, 1990; Reinharz, 1993) because women's experience and perception of the world differs from men's. In her talk, 'Making the Everyday and Everynight World Problematic', Smith (1994), reiterated that taking the actual experiences of women as they understand their own world in their own way, *not the way it is understood by others* [my emphasis], forms the basis of this approach. Feminist research is about "direct experience directly related to us as women and as researchers" (Fonow & Cook, 1990:71). Feminist methods are still evolving; therefore, there is no single methodology. However, I found oral history methodology to be most suitable for this type of research. Extensive, in-depth interviews with women will provide us with rich and complex data that reflects the women's experiences from their own perspectives.

It is from this premise that I ground my research. The purpose of my research, as outlined in chapter one, is to document parenting experiences of immigrant women of African descent from

their own perspective. In order to facilitate this purpose, and to stay within the feminist research framework, I employed Feminist Oral History Methodology by conducting in-depth interviews. Oral History "is a basic tool in our efforts to incorporate the previously overlooked lives, activities, and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and of the present" (Anderson, et. al., 1990:95). Feminist Oral History differs from traditional oral history in that it goes further than documenting activities; it incorporates feelings and values in its research methodology (Anderson et al., 1990:96, citing Anderson & Armitage).

I also chose this methodology because it is consistent with the intentions of Black Feminist Thought, those "ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (Collins, 1991:37). This perspective, therefore, adds a racial and/or cultural perspective to feminist research. As outlined in the preceding chapter, Collins identifies a cultural difference in the way in which women of African descent express themselves. Oral history methodology, therefore, facilitates identification of this difference. Proponents of this methodology maintain that this research methodology is suited for research on women of African descent. Etter-Lewis (1991:43), maintains that "When applied to women of color, it assumes added significance as a powerful instrument for the rediscovery of womanhood so often overlooked and/or neglected in history and literature alike". She argues that this research method brings to the surface the multi-faceted nature of black women's lives as characterized by the intersection of "gender, race, social class with language, history and culture" (43). Another factor which

proponents of the 'representation of black women's voices' bring to light is that the style of expression unique to the black narrator necessitates the oral history methodology. (Etter-Lewis, 1991; Busia, 1993). Also, as a female researcher who comes from an oral history background, I identify more with this methodology. Sharing the same 'oral history' background with my co-researchers, I found the interview atmosphere very relaxing.

My research also takes a feminist ethnographic perspective in that it attempts to situate women's experiences in relation to wider social structures. Following Smith, this research claims to be "able to disclose for women how our own situations are organized and determined by social processes that extend outside the scope of the everyday world and are not discoverable within it" (Smith, 1987:152). As she further argues, this perspective is "concerned with how the phenomena known to sociology express the actual activities of actual individuals [by] exploring how these phenomena are organized as social relations " (153). Based on this perspective, it follows then, that change in the social structure will affect the way in which women experience their world. Therefore, feminist research must also reflect on the aspect of change. This can be done by providing "imaginative alternatives that suggest how women themselves have changed and how they have resisted or neutralized the forces that control their lives and constrain their options" (Baber & Allen, 1992:18). By employing the oral history methodology, I was able to explore how the aspects of social organization and change manifested themselves in the everyday lives of my co-researchers. The oral history methodology, through intensive interviews, is a

relevant and appropriate instrument which I employed to identify ways in which the complex processes of change occurring in the parenting environments of my co-researchers effected change in their parenting perspectives.

The above discussion demonstrates that oral history may be one of the most powerful research methodologies through which feminist methodological themes may be unified. One such theme is the theme of 'subjectivity', which is one of the basic themes of feminist methodologies. According to this notion, the feminist researcher treats co-researchers as subjective beings. One way of facilitating this element is to encourage a reciprocal relationship or even friendship between the researcher and co-researchers during the research (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991:136; Warren, 1986:4; Stacey, 1991:114; Reinharz, 1992:28). Citing Smith (1987) and Thompson (1992), Baber and Allen maintain:

> "Feminist research embraces women's subjective knowledge of their own lives and thereby expands understanding of the actual experiences of women to replace what has been distorted and falsely constructed in the past with a grounded understanding of women's everyday existence." (Baber & Allen, 1992:17)

However, regardless of the quest to subjectify women, this approach has limitations. Stacey (1991), bases her criticism on her experience as researcher. She explains how, because of its nature, ethnography ends up being manipulating, betraying and exploitative

and reinforcing inequality between the researcher and the co-researchers because in the end

> "the research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by informants. It is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice." (Stacey, 1991:114)

Similarly, the notion of establishing friendships and corroboration's with the co-researchers advocated by some theorists, does not eliminate the possibility of exploitation and manipulation. The co-researchers are still objectified as they assume the role of providers of information, while the researcher is the extractor of the information. (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991:141).

In an attempt to iron out these contradictions, feminist oral historians have come up with alternatives. Borland (1991), argues that researchers should interpret and analyze co-researchers' narratives. She argues that if feminist researchers abstain from doing this, we would be contradicting our basic duty of politicizing women's experiences. She suggests an interpretive and analytical model which represents both the researcher's and the participant's perspectives. By so doing, she argues, we will be presenting "our work in a way that grants the speaking woman interpretative respect without relinquishing our responsibility to provide our own interpretation of [the co-researchers'] experience" (64). Regarding the methodological problem of ethnography, Stacey, although she

does not envisage a condition of a pure feminist ethnography, comes up with the compromise that

> "there can be (indeed there are) ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives. There can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other." (Stacey, 1991:117)

It is also recommended by feminist methodologists that, in the process of presentation and analysis, we should minimize total abstraction of the co-researchers' experiences. This can be achieved by "letting data speak for itself", by incorporating a number of life histories, "expressed largely in women's own voices." (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991:144). Presenting data in women's voices, however, does not imply treating women as a homogeneous group. Doing so, maintains Baber & Allen,

> "obscures the richness of their thinking, experiences, and contribution and oppresses women who are not allowed to speak in their own voices. . . . We allow women to speak for themselves, avoid homogenization of women's experiences from our own perspectives. However, to appeal to a wide range and diverse audience and to facilitate an integrated 'voice', we also emphasize the commonality in women's experiences: what is universal for all members of a society, what is particular to groups, ... and what is unique to individuals." (Baber & Allen, 1992:19).

Despite the preceding methodological compromises, we are still left with an unavoidable problem. The fact that, in the end, "the researcher must objectify the experience of the researched, must translate that experience into more abstract and general terms if an analysis that links the individual to processes outside her immediate social world is to be achieved" (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991:136). Based on the preceding discussion, it follows then, that it is important that feminist researchers should present women's views accurately; that is, they should strive to present the women's stories in ways that are faithful to what they said and accurately reflect their worlds and perspectives. Given this recommendation, I would, therefore, reiterate the argument that I made earlier, that oral history research methodology appears to be one of the most powerful tools to facilitate this.

To negotiate the different possible approaches discussed, my presentation will draw heavily from Stacey's (1991) recommendation discussed above. For the same reason she gives, I combined both my co-researchers' and my perspectives in interpreting and analyzing my co-researchers' experiences. To further strengthen this analytical approach, I asked the women to interpret and analyze their experiences during the interviews. I approached my co-researchers' stories with an open mind, and use their words to develop themes. To facilitate this, I let their voices speak as much as possible. By so doing, I shall adequately subjectified them. Also, by using their voices, I minimized the possibility of misinterpretation on my part. Drawing from Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991), discussed above, I ensured that while I grouped

the women's stories into common themes, I do not obscure their individual differences by constantly juxtaposing their ideas and indicating how they differ. The discussion that follows will demonstrate how I have employed oral history in my research, and how I operationalized the selected methodology.

2. RESEARCH SAMPLE

My sample consists of six women of African descent, or African heritage. Four of the women are from Africa, two are from the Caribbean. All the women identify themselves as women of African descent, or in the case of one woman, of Caribbean cultural background. However, since the woman agreed to do the interview after learning that the research is about women of African descent, implies that she identifies herself with the other women. Moreover, Ellis (1986), in the introduction of her study about Caribbean women, maintains that although diverse cultures of the Caribbean informs the Creole culture, those of African descent forms the majority. It has also been documented that Black women as a group possess and share a unique standpoint and perspective of their experiences, although as explained above, and as maintained by Collins, "the diversity of class, region, age and sexual orientation shaping individual Black women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes" (1991:37). So, my co-researchers are more likely to have a common cultural background than not. In order to ensure that the women have enough experience of African centric culture, I looked for those women who came to Canada as adults. Another selection criteria was length of

stay in Canada. I looked for women who have at least five years of child rearing experience in Canada. The criteria was based on my own expectations that during this time, the women would have undergone some noticeable cultural changes, and would, therefore, be able to reflect on their past and explain this process of change. I also looked for those women whose children attended school, and were anywhere from grade one to twelve. I am interested in this group of children for the fact that they have a regular interaction with at least one institution outside the family. This factor would help assess the impact of such interactions on the mother-child relationship.

We have seen that feminist research advocates a reciprocal relationship, even friendship between a researcher and co-researchers (Warren, 1986:4; Reinharz, 1992:28). This aspect is satisfied by the fact that my co-researchers and I share the same heritage, and the status of motherhood. In addition, three of the women are my friends and close acquaintances and three are my friend's friends.

There are also individual differences occurring among the women. Two women are working professionals, Two women, including one of the former two, have university education, although one stays at home and home-schools her children. The other three have are post secondary certified service providers. Of the six women, four are married and live with their husbands; two are single mothers. Another different characteristic is that one woman was raised in a rural area while the rest were raised in urban areas or urban area settings.

3. INSTRUMENT

Following oral history interview guidelines, (Warren, 1986:4; Reinharz, 1992:18), I prepared informal, loosely structured and open-ended questions to encourage "the interviewee to take the lead in deciding what to talk about" (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991:140). (These questions are attached in Appendix I). I structured the questions in such a way that they fulfilled the requirements of oral history interviews as proposed by Anderson and Jack (1990). They propose a methodological shift from "information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint" (24). To accommodate this perspective, I divided the interview questions into six groups reflecting six sequential themes, addressing the historical development of their experiences. The first group of questions focused on the women's African centric socialization background and preconceptions about Canadian parenting. The second group addressed their initial experiences and perspectives and orientation experiences in Canada. The third set of questions focused on their actual interaction with their children as they perform the socialization role. The fourth set sought information on their experiences with the social institutions and the social environment with which their children interacted. The fifth group of questions required the women to reflect on their "personal construction of their experiences" (Anderson & Jack, 1990:23). The last group required the women to evaluate both the social environment and social services with the intention of identifying problematic areas and coming up with suggestions for improvement

or change. The structure and order of the questions enabled both the women and me to tap into their experiences.

4. COLLECTION OF DATA

I used interviews to provide me with firsthand information that will form the most important part of my thesis. I also used information from literature for theoretical purposes and for the purpose of substantiating and supporting my arguments.

With regard to the interviews, I first contacted my friends and acquaintances to help me find women who satisfied the requirements outlined above. After eight weeks of making about fifty phone calls and inquiries, I came up with ten women who fit the sample and were willing to do the interview. I informed the women about my research and intentions thereof. I sent the women who agreed to participate copies of the questionnaire. The aim was to acquaint my co-researchers with the questions and to give them enough time to prepare for the interview. I also wanted to give them the choice to decide whether or not they still wanted to proceed with the interview, given the questions. I provided the women with my phone number in order to call and inform me of their decision; I did not want them to feel pressurized by my calls. However, after three weeks of waiting, I decided to initiate the calls. Five women agreed to continue with the interview. Two decided not to, because of lack of time. Three never responded to my calls after repeated messages. Three of the five women who had agreed to do the interview later dropped out. Their reasons included lack of time, and desire to write down the answers rather

than be interviewed. I found a woman to fill in for one of the women. My initial sample choice was within the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, however, due to repeated setbacks, I looked into areas outside the Lower Mainland where I found three of the women. With a total of six women, I decided the sample size was large enough at this point. According to Dorothy Smith (1994), even the life history of one woman is enough to illustrate the way in which social structures operate to shape women's everyday experiences. We then scheduled dates and time for discussions.

In order to facilitate the aspect of unstructured, informal interviews, I met with the women in their homes. One woman who is a close friend decided to come to my place as it was close to her place of work.

In accordance with oral history interview methodology, I recorded the discussions on tape which I later transcribed. For the purpose of confidentiality, I destroyed the tapes immediately thereafter. I had intended to ask the women to first relate their story uninterrupted, but they felt that their experiences were very complex and suggested that I ask them questions, which I did. What I mostly stressed during the discussions in addition to giving them enough time to elaborate on their experiences, was to encourage them to identify, interpret, reflect on, analyze their situation, and in the end come up with suggestions for change. My goal was to meet the criterion of 'subjectifying' women, so that we shared the power in presenting and analyzing their experiences.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used; however, two of the six women preferred to use their real names.

5. PRESENTATION

The format I used for the presentation of this research reflects Feminist Oral History Methodology as discussed above. I have, however, selected what is suitable, relevant and helpful to my research from the approaches discussed above. In presenting the data, as recommended by feminist methodologies, I used the women's voices extensively, to satisfy the principle of hearing from the women's voices. Falling in line with Black feminist thought, I deliberately did very little sifting of my co-researchers' statements in order to illustrate individual differences in the way women of African descent express themselves, and to convey the multifaceted nature of their experiences. I also wanted to bring in the historical dimension as reflected in their voices as they attempt to construct meanings from their experiences. Like mothers in O' Donnell's (1985) research on experiences of contemporary mothers, my co-researchers, "by contrasting their reflections of the past with their interpretations of the present, were able to explore and relate 'the inner connections between their roles, their motivations, and their own manner and type of experiencing the world' " (O' Donnell, 1985:41, citing and quoting Manham, 1936).

My actual analysis draws heavily from Borland's (1991) approach of dual representation, of giving both the co-researchers and the researcher the opportunity to analyze the data. Since the women have been given the opportunity to define, interpret and analyze their experiences during the interviews, my major role was to structure the data by categorizing, arranging and summarizing common ideas emerging from discussions with my co-researchers

and finding connections between their parenting experiences and the social structures with which they interacted, much of which they did during the interviews. These ideas are then used to generate and draw conclusions. The end product of the thesis is, therefore, my presentation of the women's experiences in their own voices from their own perspective, in combination with my interpretations as informed by feminist literature and theory.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

Adua Konadu was born and raised in Ghana. She maintains, "In fact I'm African." She came to Canada in 1978. She has two daughters, whose ages were, at the time of the research, fifteen and thirteen. Both were born in Canada.

Duduza was born and raised in South Africa. She spent several years in other African countries before she came to Canada. She identifies herself as African and strongly feels that her cultural background is "deep African." At the time of the research she had already spent seven years in Canada. She has a son, who at the time of the research was twelve years old, and a Canadian born daughter, seven years old. Her son was born in Africa.

Matshidiso was also born and raised in South Africa. She, too, spent a few years in another African country. She also spent several years in the US before coming to Canada. Her fifteen year old son was born in the US, but like Duduza's daughter, was brought up in South Africa until he was eight when he came to Canada. Matshidiso identifies herself as a Motswana, which is one of the tribes in South Africa.

Elda, too, was born in South Africa. Like Matshidiso, she identifies herself according to her tribe, Sotho. What is unique in her identity is that she is the only woman among the co-researchers

who adds another dimension to her self definition, that she is African-Canadian. Like Duduza and Matshidiso, she spent several years in another African country before coming to Canada seven years ago. Elda has two sons. Their ages at the time of the research were fourteen and nine years. Both of them were born in Africa.

Naaila was born in Trinidad in the Caribbean and identifies herself as a woman of African descent. Naaila came to Canada in 1973. She has five children, three sons and two daughters. Their ages at the time of the research ranged from fourteen to six. All except the youngest were born in Canada; however, the youngest was born in Trinidad when Naaila was visiting, and came to Canada as an infant.

Veronica was born in Guyana. This is how she identifies herself:

> "Well, in terms of cultural background I'm from Guyana; and that's sort of a unique situation because Guyana is on the mainland of South America. So in terms of purposes I'm South American. However, being the only English speaking country on the mainland of South America we've never allied ourselves to those Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries nearby, and instead became part of what is known as the Caribbean. So, really, I would say I'm a Guyanese and of Caribbean background."

Veronica came to Canada after having spent nine years in England. She has two daughters whose ages at the time of the research were eighteen and fifteen. The elder was born in England and the younger in Canada.

All these women left their countries as adults. This factor seems to be an important one in giving themselves identities. They still feel bonded to their roots. In fact, they all admit that their cultural background plays a big role in their parenting; more than the Canadian one. Asked to rate the degree to which their cultural background influences their parenting, the women rated it between seven and eight out of ten, with the remaining two and three allocated to the role played by the Canadian experience. Moreover, all the women perceive themselves as primary socializers of their children, although two out of the four married women maintain that their husbands are equally involved. Two perceive their husbands as major but supplementary participants. Two women are single parents, and as a result, are unassisted. However, the fact that they are all involved as primary socializers makes their experience a common one.

2. PARENTING IN HOME COUNTRIES

Elaborating on parenting in their own countries as they experienced it, each of the women gave a similar scenario to that given by other women which is embedded within the African centric way of raising children regarding important values, the socializer and parenting methods.

2.1. Important Values

The first step was to discuss what children were taught in the women's home countries. Respect, especially for elders, emerged as

the underlying factor from which all parenting activities emanate. Matshidiso puts it this way:

"It's just a global rule that you have to respect elders."

Veronica adds:

". . . the fact that my parents were still very Caribbean in the way they raised their kids, and there was always respect for those older than you are, and age was not something to be ashamed of, but rather was something upheld with lot of respect."

Naaila maintains:

" We are actually taught how to do this you know. . . sort of had no choice. . . . to respect the elders is very important, more than the elders respecting the child you know."

Adua Konadu's statement reflects 'how to do this:

"You know when you have to talk. Perhaps an adult is talking, you can't just budge in. You have to wait till your turn . . . . When adults are having a conversation, you as a kid you can't sit there; you have to be somewhere."

Respect for elders does not only imply the younger members being polite and listening to elders. It also involves taking care of them. As Veronica maintains, "It was absolutely the responsibility of everyone to see that elderly people are cared for."

Although respect for the elders got primary emphasis, the children were also taught to respect everybody else including themselves.

> ". . . you have to do unto others as you do to yourself, . . ." (Matshidiso)

> "What the mother teaches the children a lot is respect for any age, . . ." (Naaila)

> ". . . teaching us you know, . . . how to respect myself as a girl." (Duduza)

In a way, respect facilitates other sub-values, for example caring, which in return facilitates the rendering of the core value of respect. These sub- values, in addition to caring, include sharing, cooperation, helping one another. The sub-values, taken together, are very important building blocks for the sense of community. Just as it was expected that everybody takes care of the elderly,

> "We were brought up to share with each other, you know, with brothers and relatives, and care not only for your immediate family but others around you, you know." (Naaila)

". . . and then to cooperate with the elderly people. . . . What I like about the children is that they are taught to love and share in Africa, . . ." (Elda)

"There was sharing, an opportunity to share, no matter what." (Veronica)

The sense of responsibility, according to my co-researchers, was also deemed very important, hence it is introduced at a very early age, from six to twelve years. By 'responsibility' we mean the ability to carry out basic tasks in the absence of adults, and to look after one's self and other members of the family who cannot take care of themselves. Such tasks, according to my co-researchers, included taking care of themselves in hygiene, taking care of their younger siblings and preparing meals for themselves. The children were also expected to find their way around the village or the city. This factor enabled parents to send the children on errands outside the homestead without fear that they might get lost.

As is common globally, such responsibilities were gendered. Girls were not only expected to perform household duties, but also "to be financially independent in order to survive." In a way, girls received a double message by being educated for both domestic work and a career. Such "contradictory expectations" are common "as girls move into the world of school and the larger society" (Hammer, 1975:63). Girls were also expected to take more responsibility than boys while "The boys, all they had to do was to think in terms of career." Based on Adua Konadu's statement, the gender role pattern could only be overturned by a situation where

the eldest child was a boy and there was no older female relative other than the mother around. In this case the boy was expected to help with household chores as well as take care of his younger siblings just as is expected of the girl, however, to a lesser degree than a female child. Otherwise

> "the boys tend to play, you know, go out and play, and usually they come home, and dinner is ready, sort of thing,. . . " (Adua Konadu)

The principle of responsibility appears to be strongly tied with principles of self discipline and independence. For example, all but one mother felt it is the responsibility of the child to see to it that he/she does his/her school work independent of help from home . The parent's responsibility as far as the education of their children goes lies in providing for finances, books, uniform and the necessary material facilities. Parents don't get involved "unless you get into trouble. . ." Irresponsibility on the part of the child calls for discipline.

The importance of academic education runs through the stories of four women. As Naaila puts it,

> "Well, there's a strong emphasis on academics, from an early age of kindergarten . . ."

In addition, Naaila was also taught "determination and perseverance, strife for excellence, doing the best in whatever you do, being humble, . . ."

2.2. **The Socializer**

Responding to the question 'who is responsible for socializing the children', four of the women identified the mother as the primary socializer. One woman felt it was the responsibility of the family, "if you define your family as that of being a father, mother and children." The remaining woman identified both parents as "the principal figures." Despite these different perspectives as to who in particular, is the most responsible socializer, the common thread binding the women's statements is that relatives, neighbors and community elders were also responsible for raising and disciplining all the children of the community. The joint effort made by the whole community towards the parenting of the children is revealed by the following statements. Adua Konadu had this to say:

> "Where I come from it's like everybody is everybody's mother, and everybody's problem, . . . and everybody's father. Everybody knows everybody in the town, so you can't really. . . Anything you do your parents find out. Everybody looks out for everybody, . . . So everything is done by everybody watching out for everybody. . . . Everybody is involved."

Duduza commented about the role of the neighbors:

> "Your neighbor is like your brother or sister. You know, it's like your neighbor is part of your family. It is not someone who is a stranger to you. You can just leave your children with your neighbor; you know that your neighbor will take care of them."

Veronica's statement reflects the order in which the responsibility was assumed:

> "There was joint responsibility by everyone, if the mom was not there, usually there was a grandmother there, or some extended family, or if there was no extended family which is a rare case, there would be friends of the family who filled that extended family, and so they would assume those responsibilities."

The responsibility assumed by the older people in the community seems to endow them with the authority to administer discipline.

> "and the discipline does not only come from the family appropriate, but it also comes from the extended family, and any adult who lives in the community is expected to participate in the discipline of those children because anybody who is older than you is supposed to be respected." (Matshidiso)

> ". . . when the child is doing something wrong there, the neighbor has the right to interfere and discipline there and then before the neighbor will come to you as the parent to talk to you." (Duduza)

> "Yes, we had to respect neighbors, so that they had the rights, they were given the rights by parents to discipline us." (Naaila)

The older community members had the same disciplinary rights as the parents. Due to the fact that there was uniformity in the values and the standard of raising children, every older member of society knew when the child was "breaking the rules" and what type of punishment if any (including physical), was suitable to what type of wrong doing. Duduza responds with a chuckle:

> "That is so interesting you know, it's the same, it's just the same. If the neighbor is going to use physical punishment, it's the same; your parents would have also used the same type of punishment."

Veronica concurs:

> "If my mother left me with a neighbor and she saw it fit to discipline me, my mother would not intervene in that discipline. She would uphold that discipline, . . . Yes, Yes, you would know when he was breaking the rules, yes."

The fact that the type of the discipline and the upheld values, harmonizes with those of the school and church systems further solidifies this uniformity. This factor was identified by three women.

> ". . . even in the formal education you find that there is intertwined responsibility that is expected . . . there was a very thin line between what was expected of me in terms of behavior at home and in terms of behavior at school." (Matshidiso)

". . . I think the British system of education, and it was very strict and, . . . there was some good in it because we tended to respect authority." (Naaila)

"Well, having been under colonial rule of the British system, and also influenced by Christianity, but coupled with that was a more wider Caribbean aspect of thing . . ." (Veronica)

Despite this apparent uniformity on the aspect of discipline and the socialization process, there are exceptions. In Adua Konadu's case, this discipline is limited in that only the parents or the primary caretaker can administer physical punishment. Other adults could only go as far as admonishing the child for any wrong doing and reporting the wrong behavior to the parents.

Variations in degree occurred in individual families, also. As Naaila puts it,

"My mother was very, . . . she didn't, like other neighbors, like us to play idly, you know. We had to go on errands, then she would allow us. My family, my brothers and myself were kept very protected. We got to see other kids playing, you know, in people's yards, and in the streets, but we weren't allowed to do that. We were very protected, you know. My mother was not very sociable, and she kept us behind doors."

Naaila's story reflects a situation where differences among the women's experiences may occur. The difference as revealed by her account is a matter of degree. It does not negate the fact that a standard form of socialization existed. All the women, including Naaila, except for this slight difference, agree that they were raised

in the same way as the rest of the children in their community as far as the values and discipline were concerned.

The non parent socializer-child relationship goes beyond that of being a care taker to the child and a disciplinarian. Just like the parent, any adult has the right to send any child for errands in the absence of her own and/or when stranded, without any fear.

> "I'd be walking on the road, and my mom's friend would call me up, tell me to go run errands for her, and when I go home and I'm late, my mom asks me how come you're late, so I'd say, I saw this person, your friend, and she wanted me to go pick up this and that; no problem."

The general pattern of the adult-child relationship is that any adult in the community assumes the role of the biological parent when deemed necessary. The children, too, relate to the adult as they would do to their own parents. However, this relationship reflects a more complicated pattern.

The involvement of "everybody" does not go without hierarchy in terms of who carries out which parenting responsibilities in the absence of the parents. The grandparents, especially the grandmother, were found to occupy the highest level of this hierarchy which, for the most part, interchanges with that of the biological parents. They play the first and crucial role in the parenting role both during short term and long term absence of the biological parents. In the case where the grandmother is a member of the family, she is constantly involved in the socialization of her

grandchildren. This important role is vividly remembered by Duduza.

> "Oh, grandparents, I'd say they are everything. Here (in Canada) they'll say you are a psychologist, but I don't know what to call our grandparents because they were everything. They'd be there for the children, they'd be there for your parents. The divorce wasn't so much because they'll always be there. If there is something going wrong with your mom and your dad, your grandmother is there, and they'll talk you know, and then you know, they'll solve the problem."

As reflected in Duduza's statement, the role of the grandparents went beyond that of the socialization of the grandchildren. It also included that of resolving conflicts within the family. In a way, their involvement in such conflicts also facilitated a healthy and solid socialization environment for the children by minimizing the possibility of divorce.

During the long term absence of the mother, grandmothers played the role of surrogate mothers. For example, Elda and Adua Konadu were both raised by their grandmothers. In both cases, the mother was hardly home due to employment. So this is relevant for their current experience. They must raise their children as mothers, while they may not have a very full mother-child model to draw from because they were raised by their grandmothers; however, uniformity of parenting will minimize any major differences from women who were raised by their birth mothers. The general pattern is that relatives who were part of the family (the inside relatives) got almost as equally involved as the parents. Those who did not live with the family (the outside relatives) would

spontaneously play their part in times of need, the factor that placed them in the second, yet flexible, hierarchical level depending on their specific roles and need.

The place occupied by the neighbors on this hierarchical ladder appears to be determined by geographical proximity between the family and the 'outside relatives', which in most cases, places the neighbors closer to the family than the latter on a daily basis. In this case the neighbors, who would otherwise occupy the third level, find themselves occupying the second level, and on other occasions the first one. By virtue of this proximity, they find themselves assuming more socialization responsibility than the outside relatives. They interact with the family on a daily basis, and are the first to take on the responsibility of either the 'inside relatives' or the parents in times of need. This is why children were never really on their own. As stated by Matshidiso, "There was always somebody around" Despite this responsibility, neighbors would very rarely, if ever, be given responsibility for long term care and socialization. This was almost exclusively the responsibility of the relatives. Elda notes:

> "Extended families normally participate when there is a crisis in the family, but I've never witnessed any outsiders raising strange children."

Instead, if there was no relative already present in the home, an unattached, responsible relative would be called to live with the

children, or in the absence of such a relative, the children would move to live with the outside relative.

The rest of the community (whether an acquaintance or a stranger) would normally occupy the fourth level. They would intervene in the socialization process whenever they felt the need. In my experience, the elders or the colleagues of the parents would even intervene in the presence of the parents. As already cited as part of a quotation, "Everybody looks out for everybody."

Laid out by the discussion, the role played by the extended family, the relatives, the neighbors and the community at large, reflects a strong community system from which the mother draws support in the process of raising her children.

2.3. **Parenting Methods**

Parenting uniformity also extends to the methods used. The women mentioned various methods used in the socialization process, including discipline. Among other ways, children learned by observation. This is how Adua Konadu learned how to cook.

> ". . . you kind of when you're growing up, when your parents are cooking, you're always sitting there . . . you're sitting over there by the pot, and charcoal, throwing it in; and you know, your parents put the ingredients in the pot, you should supply it, and that's the way you learn to cook. . . . So you just watch and by eight [years old], you can be cooking something."

One other popular method of encouraging accepted values comprised folklore and "scary stories" told to younger children. Naaila still has a vivid memory of such stories.

> "I remember my grandmother talk about scary things that would happen to you if you go out after dark; so we were sort of discouraged to go out, especially not long ago; but that made us develop morals you know. Looking back, you wouldn't wanna go out there because you'd remember all those scary stories, and that way it was entertaining at the same time."

Should the children continue to fail to abide by the rules, after they had been talked to, they would be punished. Corporal punishment in the form of spanking, smacking or caning seemed to emerge as one of the common types of punishment which was used both at home and at school.

> "You got a lot of punishment by smacking; and in fact when I was at primary school we still got that kind of punishment during the school period for things that you might have done wrong. I remember still being caned for missing a few mathematical questions, et cetera. So, there was a lot of that still." (Veronica)

> ". . . if the children do not cooperate, corporal punishment is applied. . . " (Duduza)

> "There was corporal punishment, kids getting spanked quite often, that's most of what I can remember, . . ." (Naaila)

The women's narratives about their socialization background informs us that regardless of their country of origin, they are bound together by the thread of African centricity, as illustrated by their self

identification. The women's stories about their childhood experiences also reflect this thread. They were generally raised in the same way. The differences were mainly of degree, where some parents might be stricter than others. Their family and social structures, as revealed by their stories, reflect strong similarities. Their experience and heritage resembles that explained by the African centric theoretical viewpoint as discussed above. The women appear to have been socialized according to basic African centric values. Authors writing on African centric socialization have identified the importance of the values of respect, sharing and cooperation, and early responsibility. (Kaye, 1962; Levine & Levine, 1966; Assimeng, 1976; Amadi, 1982; Babatunde, 1992;). The same authors also reported on the supportive role played by the extended family and participatory parenting by the community at large.

It follows, then, that the women carry with them a different sense of identity and philosophy that is different from the Canadian which is patterned after the western philosophy as outlined above. Their unique identity will inform a common parenting experience which is different from that of Canadian born mothers, although differences in the way in which they approach their parenting may occur.

It should be noted that this background information is from the women's perspectives as experienced at a particular point in time. Some of this information might not be representative of the present situation in these women's home countries. The information is, however, vital in demonstrating how their past experience

influences the way they interpret and perceive their parenting parenting in Canada.

CHAPTER IV

CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

1. PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT CANADIAN PARENTING

Four of the women did not have any idea about parenting issues in Canada. They did not even think in terms of this area. They just assumed that children were raised the same way as in their home countries. This is what Adua Konadu said when she was asked about her expectations of Canadian parenting.

> "Well, when I was coming, I was very ignorant when it comes to this. I thought everybody or every country is the same as where I come from myself, the same thing as in Canada."

Duduza too, echoed lack of such knowledge:

> "To be honest, you know, I didn't know that much. I just thought that children are being raised the same way."

She not only made this assumption, but she also did not think in terms of parenting even though she already had a child and was expecting another because

> ". . ., I didn't think that I would stay that long; so it was something temporary and then I found myself here for seven years."

Of the four women, Veronica's experience in England gave her a different perspective on her expectations. She did not expect a situation similar to that of Guyana. She based her expectations on the fact that both Canada and England are industrialized countries. This is what she thought:

> ". . .I figured that it would be exactly like it was in England, . . ."

Only Matshidiso and Naaila had some idea about Canadian parenting, which they got from reading and movies. This is what Naaila learned from Canadian movies:

> "I saw the differences with my culture. I saw a more relaxed, less demanding or expectant [situation]. The Canadian parents would encourage their children to be more expressive; like in my culture if the child becomes too expressive, that could be considered as disrespectful, . . "

As a result, she not only "expected that to be true", but also formed fantasies based on the images.

> "I did fantasize about having children here; and what I fantasized about was being able to bring them up in a less strict way than I was brought up because the culture here was like that, and I did fantasize about being able to bring up my children in that way and not being ostracized; but I was afraid of the too much freedom; like they were less worried about morality and all that kind of lifestyle I was coming from."

When she came to Canada, Matshidiso was aware of Canadian child protective laws. This is what she said:

> "And I had also known before I came here that raising children also involves welfare laws from the government that protect children from certain things that happen within the family, . . . I read a little about it, especially when I learned while I was still in South Africa, about children in Canada being able to call 911 if they feel that they are being abused by their parents, . . ."

It is evident from the women's stories that they knew very little or nothing about Canadian parenting prior to arrival to Canada.

2. 'WELCOME TO CANADA'

Once in Canada, the women found themselves faced with a series of challenges, cultural shocks, surprises, confusion, frustrations and new discoveries in a social environment entirely different from the one they knew. These were related to accessing information, demanding parenting, Canadian children, the vulnerability of children and materialism.

First, on arrival none of the women claims to have been officially provided with information about raising or socializing children in Canada, particularly for immigrant parents. Such information would include a list of available parenting resources and programs, expectations from parents, Canadian children, child protective policies, children's rights, or any other information which might simplify parenting for arriving immigrant parents. Neither did they receive any referrals on where or how to obtain such

information even though two of them were accompanied by their children (Veronica and Elda), and one was visibly pregnant (Duduza). The only information one woman claimed to have received was about the location of schools. Elda had the following to say about unavailability of such information.

> "I did not get much information about socializing children in Canada when I came. The only information I got was that of school, where schools were situated and so on, because my elder son had to go to school.

She also did not get enough information regarding parenting resources and programs:

> "I didn't know them at that time. All I knew was I got information from my children's school that there was a daycare center, and they told me how to get daycare centers for my children. That was it. I didn't get any information about socializing my children in Canada."

For the remaining women, responses were 'No' for three of them, and 'Nothing' for one. Due to lack of knowledge regarding information on parenting resources, some of the women found themselves frustrated. Matshidiso had expected her son's school to provide her with the information she needed but the school did not have it. As a result, she found herself going from one place to the other in search of the much needed information. This is how she relates her experience in this respect.

". . . I did not find much information. I ended up asking churches about information as what I could do to get help in terms of the upbringing of a child in a different culture. . . . the idea I had was to find out from social workers, but all they had was daycare, and camps, and they said that the school that my child goes to would provide such information; so I learned later that the school would be able to give me information, and they did."

Absence of such vital information on arrival delayed access to this information. It took the women an average period of four years before obtaining such crucial information about parenting. For Elda, the delay was very long. She had just found out about parenting programs "just about a month ago [at the time of research] from my nursing program. . ."

The main reason for the delay seems to have stemmed from lack of awareness as to whether such information existed and, if so, where to obtain it on the part of the women. Only one woman maintains she did not bother to find out since she was not a mother at the time of arrival. Two of the women, however, were able to access such information within a few months of their arrival. One of them is Matshidiso, who, perhaps due to her background in social work, had an idea that such information had to be available somewhere, somehow. The other is Adua Konadu. Her advantage over the other women was that her husband, who works with social services, provided her with formal parenting information. In addition, the fact that she and her husband are foster parents meant she got first hand experience by getting directly involved with

Canadian children on a daily basis. This makes her information system more diverse that the rest of the women.

Partly due to scarcity of formal information pertaining to child rearing, the women found themselves relying more on acquaintances, friends, relatives (in the case of Naaila) and the children themselves for information, advice and knowledge regarding the issues of child rearing. On other occasions, the media was used as a pool of information. Asked as to how they initially got any parenting information, those women who did not have the opportunity to access formal information gave the following answers.

> "I just heard from the news, and also from my friends. We talked, Canadian friends." (Duduza)

> "It's just through the interaction of my children with other kids when they come here, you know. I sort of observe how the kids interact with their parents, how my children interact with the other kids and how they behave and so on. So, I didn't get it from a written thing, it's just through my own observations, my conclusions, my personal meaning and so on." (Elda)

> "I think the first way I learned about this was I made friends. . ." (Veronica)

There are, however, other women who did a lot of research on this issue as they became more acquainted with the Canadian social environment. For example, although Naaila was not provided with any information pertaining to parenting on arrival she "read a lot"

about the issue, and especially when she became a parent. Her account is as follows:

> "Well, actually, the moment I became a parent that was my..., I made it my business to find out about as much information about parenting as I could and got involved in different groups; and they have a lot of information about parenting skills. I made it my business to make myself part of it."

Whereas Canadian-born mothers may use similar methods as immigrant mothers to access parenting resources, the reality is that the former group of women has an advantage over the latter. The former group is already familiar with the environment; they have been socialized in it. They already have relatives, friends and acquaintances to provide them with relevant information. In contrast, immigrant mothers rarely have such support readily available as they usually leave their relatives and friends behind. They begin by fumbling, and as pointed out above, take long periods of time before accessing information. In addition, whilst Canadian-born mothers might be looking for some of the best programs, immigrant mothers might be desperate to find whatever program is available.

Second, these mothers realized that parenting in Canada is a very demanding task, especially in the absence of social support systems they were used to back in their home countries, in particular the extended family. They feel parents are expected to play a much bigger role than they were used to when it comes to

daily care giving. This is what some of the women said about the situation.

> "I think I was surprised when I arrived to realize that the amount of effort given by the parents to raise their children [was overwhelming] you know." (Elda)

> "And also the mother's role was very much exhausting in the sense that if she were to keep up with the expectations she had to, then it was almost like a full time job to chauffeur these kids back and forth to expected things that were necessary to do, be like other kids." (Veronica)

> "I find that I do many things in the house, there is no help; children are there; they are always there for me. I carry all the responsibilities; there is no one who can relieve me; but if I do, I have to pay someone to do that." (Duduza)

Third, having been raised with the basic value of respect inculcated in them, the women were also shocked by the cultural difference pertaining to Canadian value system, especially that of respect. The basic observation is that Canadian children give less respect than the children from their own countries. The following are some of the observations made by Duduza, Elda, Naaila, Matshidiso and Adua Konadu respectfully in relation to Canadian children.

> ". . . kids here are just spoilt."

". . . I don't think children here are well disciplined because some of them are disrespectful to the elderly, and always my own children don't listen, don't listen all the time. They only hear me talk. They only hear me talk but they never listen. Even when they listen sometimes they argue with you. They communicate with me as if they are at the same level with me. Whereas in Africa, when I was growing up I used to communicate with my parent as a parent who is at a higher level than me. . . . in Canada children communicate with an elderly person as if they are at the same level. . . . And from my own personal meaning about bad behavior it's like being disrespectful."

"They had less respect for elders and the elders didn't mind and all that."

"Even the way they regard their elders, is far different [less respectful] from what we would do in Africa."

". . . just taking my children out and watching other children, the way I was raised, I guess I told myself, I have to do better than what I am seeing, you know, the way they talk to their parents, screaming at their parents when they're asking something, . . . That's what I found. We go out with other kids, we watch the kids, how they're screaming at their moms, 'no, you go get it, it's yours, why can't you get it', My kids can't tell me that. When I say, 'can you get me that, please,' you get it, you bring it here. But they say, 'can you get me that?' 'No, you go get it. Why should I go get it? You have legs to walk; go get it.' So, I tell my kids, see that, there's no way you are going to talk like that to me. You don't talk like that to me."

Only one woman did not comment about the behavior of Canadian children in particular. Nevertheless, the experience she had in the parenting course she attended reflected a different set of values and beliefs. This is what she said in this respect.

> "I did a parenting course which for me was really interesting- because you mentioned values- and I found myself quite often at the other end when we did a little test. I was..., my values and beliefs were a little way out from a lot of other people's, and that was interesting."

One other factor which some women found appalling was the age at which Canadian children engage in adult activities like smoking, staying out late, dating, and applying make up. They think that the age is too early, when comparing it to how they have been raised. This is Adua Konadu's observation:

> "I see people at my daughter's age, at this time of the night [later than eight in winter], and I ask myself: what would a fourteen year old, nine year old, ten year old be doing there? Their parents probably don't know where they are,. . . I live here. This field, summer time, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, they're screaming their heads off, just thinking they are having fun. . . . But you see them out there, with all their make up, . . .but for a ten year old with lipsticks and makeup; you don't need it. You're ten years old. . . . Kids smoking, who are not even like, . . .So I came here and see all these twelve year olds, ten year olds smoke and that surprised me. But it's their way of life, they're living it. The kids are not allowed to do it but the peers, and they see it and they do it. . . . Kids being kids, and not having boyfriends at age twelve and thirteen, and their parents accepting it at their

homes. I remember one time I went to the movie, two years ago, and there was a family of mother, father, son and the girlfriend which I thought was her sister; and they were not more than fourteen years old. . . . as long as they were together I don't have a problem with that; but every two minutes they've been there kissing, kissing, kissing. That drove me crazy. . . . Kids being kids, and adults being adults. I wouldn't wanna sit in a movie theater, or in my house with my thirteen year old, with my fourteen year old, sitting with their boyfriends, apart from me, every two minutes kissing."

Matshidiso commented:

". . . children live a very fast life here. They get into several other things that are somehow dangerous and somehow too far much beyond their age, for instance smoking. . . ., you find that they are allowed to do certain things; the age of driving is different from what could have been allowed at home, the age of drinking is different from what would be allowed in Africa. What I mean is that to me it's too soon at sixteen. I think that a child at sixteen is still trying to battle with being an adult and a teenager. In Africa, I find that for my generation when you reached nineteen and twenty that was the time when at least you were set to know that you are an adult and you were ready to get married and you were able to take up responsibility of either choosing whether you want to involve yourself in things like drinking; but here children even start at age twelve."

Duduza, too, was shocked to see "nine year olds smoking", and to add to her shock, no adult intervened. Elda, on the other hand, does not expect her fifteen year old son to smoke or kiss girls.

The women have a common perception of Canadian children's behavior as less desirable than they are used to; however, they have individual differences in the way they interpret Canadian children's behavior in relation to their children. Other women, Veronica and Elda in particular, include their own children in this perception; so that their children are "just like" the rest of the children they know. However, one woman, tends to perceive her children's behavior as separate from the rest, yet [the behavior], fluctuating between that of Canadian children what she expects. An interesting factor is that she tend sto use these perceptions as reference in their parenting. Her words, "I guesss I told myself, I have to do better . . ." and "So, I tell my kids, . . . " indicate this.

Fourth, was the shock expressed by some of the women in relation to the vulnerability of the children in Canada. They felt that children in Canada are more likely to be abducted or killed than in their home countries. This is what some of the women said on this issue.

> . . . children here, they are being kidnapped, they arebeing killed, . . . I won't even say children are safe you know. There are lots of things which are going on, which, well . . . there are lots of things which happen to children, which are done by the adults." (Duduza)

> "When I came here I was shocked to be confronted by the vulnerability of the kids. I think the children are quite vulnerable in Canada because there's lots of kidnapping. You always have to protect your children. And I was not aware of that. But you know in Africa as

> I said a child of nine can just go around, it's not a common thing for children to be kidnapped and so on. So, children are very safe. When I came here, I learned that children are not quite safe. I didn't really appreciate it how children are protected all the time." (Elda)

Sometimes, despite the safety of children in Africa, circumstances may arise which may threaten the safety of children. Elder is aware of this fact. She maintains:

> "I know for instance in South Africa during the riots, kids can get lost, and they can lose their houses due to fear for the Boers but at the same time abusing and kidnapping is not common in South Africa."

The women's perceptions about children tend to be in conflict. On the one hand, in terms of behavior, the children are perceived deviant. On the other hand, in terms of safety, we see the maternal protective love taking over as they are perceived as vulnerable victims.

Fifth, the women were also appalled by the value attached to materialism reflected in Canadian society, which, in their opinion, is unrealistically high as compared to the way in which they were raised. They think that Canadian society is more concerned with what a person has than what a person is. The women had the following observations to communicate regarding the issue.

"It's this thing of presents all the time. If there is any holiday it means you have to buy something. You know there is a birthday, you have to buy something." (Duduza)

"Children are given this and that, and socialized and stuff, . . . lots of material things." (Elda)

"I suddenly realized that in all the places [she has been] it was the person that counts and here it was material acquisition that counts . . . Here children have lots of expectations of material things, lots of toys and things like I've never seen before, and acquisition of lots of material things." (Veronica)

The way children are socialized in Africa is that, . . . they have to make their own toys, . . . but children here in Canada have plenty of material to use in terms of education and socialization. They have plenty of toys, they have plenty of things like Nintendos and all that." (Matshidiso)

It appears over provision of material things becomes problematic when it focuses on the individual child, and when individual parents are expected to be the sole providers. However, they tend to welcome the materialistic world provided by the social services and intended to be shared by everybody. The women had positive experiences in relation to the material environment as a place that facilitates social activities for children. Naaila made the following observation in this respect.

"Well, I think that Canadians are very fortunate to have a lot of resources and in formation and opportunities for their children that I didn't have as a child in my country, . . . because I see the Canadian social environment as having enough resources to have effective parenting skill. . . ; but there's a rift in cultural aspect in that women who come from countries like my country, they don't give enough of their skills. . ."

In support, Elda remarked:

"but in Canada there are . . . beautiful parks, and so on; so I think I was very impressed when I first came to Canada to realize that there is lot of effort put in to socialize kids. . . my eldest son plays basketball and soccer and he benefits from it because he exercises; and also my younger son, too, I take him to hockey and I think he benefits from that institution, too.. . . There's lots of material things for the children, swimming pools, parks, and movie theaters and so on; at the same time, my children are very vulnerable here in Canada, like with regards to racial discrimination, they are very vulnerable. . . . if there is negativity out there, we, as visible [minorities], will be afraid to even go and use the facilities available, fearing that you know, you come back home upset. . ."

Matshidiso added:

"And the other thing is they've got parks and areas and centers where you can take your child- the beach and what have you. If you like your child to learn more about external enjoyment, you can do that; you have an option. And if you like to learn more about internal games and you keep your child indoors, you have that option, whereas at home, given the situation, you only

have one option. . . . So, I think they have more options on the way you can choose to parent your child, depending on your life style."

Veronica, too, noticed the same factor:

"The good things that I saw in the community was that the kids were pretty actively learning good things; and that if you have the time, they could learn lots. There was such a wide scope of athletic and educational things that they could learn, with the mother having time to do that, or the father, or both parents."

One woman commended Canada for its well developed infrastructure which facilitated a high level of accessibility which makes her parenting easier. This is what she said:

"I think mobility here is very high and fast. It's easy to go and reach your child after work within a short space of time: and another thing is having a telephone you know, you can connect, and also being able to access your friends. So, I think that balances [absence of extended family because] you have other equipment that you can use to be in touch with your family, and to do parenting from a distance as I will call it, parenting from work."

Whereas the women have expressed their concerns with regard to the safety of their children, one woman was, at the same time impressed by "the way in which women are protecting their children." One woman feels Vancouver is a safer place than many

places in the world as far as crime is concerned. Her argument is as follows:

> "The only thing I like about being in Vancouver is that, and I know there is [a high]crime rate all over the world but I think Vancouver has so far proved to be a safe area to bring up a child, away from wars, and away from hard things."

Elda, in particular, was impressed by the level of caring and support provided by the Canadian government for single mothers as they raise their children.

> "and I like the way, you know, in Canada even if you are not married, you can still get a place where you can raise your children. That's one thing I like. The environment is good in that women can always get away. We can always go on with our lives without the men being there."

Veronica made the following comment regarding the care provided to children:

> I realized that the children were very well provided for as far as health care and other basic services like that."

In support, Duduza observed that

> "There are daycares you know, there are people who can take in your children if you want to be relieved; but you

have to pay them, which is difficult for other women to do that. . ."

It appears, however, that availability of these positive factors does not always guarantee accessibility. There are limiting factors. Veronica identifies unavailability of parents and time as determining factors to accessibility. Matshidiso identifies the lifestyle of the family as one of the constraints. These two factors may heavily affect employed single mothers, as is the case of the two women who raised these concerns. Racism, as indicated by Elda's account above, may be another limiting factor. In addition, poverty, a factor identified by Elda during the interview, may also set limitations to those women who cannot afford to pay for certain available services and social facilities and activities.

The above discussion demonstrates that Canadian culture is foreign to my co-researchers. Cultural differences do exist. Such differences shape the women's perceptions of Canadian culture. What may be regarded as relevant by Canadians may be interpreted otherwise by these women, since they use their pre Canadian notions of reality to explain their experiences in Canada. This problem is further compounded by unavailability of relevant information to help immigrant mothers to adapt easily, in particular those who come from countries outside the west.

3. THE PARENTING ACTIVITY

As parents, the women draw both from their African centric and Canadian experiences, although they maintain that they are

influenced more by the former than the latter. Asked to rate the degree to which their cultural background and Canadian experience each influences their parenting on a scale of zero to ten, whereby zero represented 'not at all' and ten represented 'everything', three women rated the pre Canadian experience at seven and the Canadian experience at three, two women at eight and two respectively. Only one woman seems to balance both experiences with the former rating at six and the latter at five.

These two frameworks constitute a pool of parenting information and knowledge and ideas from which the women select only what they need to facilitate the type of parenting they want. Ultimately, each woman emerges with a personal parenting framework, unique to her situation. Veronica had this to say in this regard:

> "I have probably a combined attitude based on my own experiences; but also as I became an adult there was certain things I didn't like, ... but I did not completely have this authoritarian rule with my kids. They could reason with me and all that; and I didn't believe in the smacking business too much, . . . I thought that was excessive in the Caribbean. So, I'm tempted to say a more diplomatic approach. And also I did not encourage my children with formalized religion because there is some conflict in my mind, and also wanted my kids to be able to reason things out for themselves . . . ."

Supporting this view, is Naaila.

> "I find it very important to make distinctions and to see where you could make it better using their method, or where you can disregard their method you know, change whatever you have to change. I do live in Canada and my children are Canadians; they are not Trinidadians.

> So I have to sort of adapt to them in a positive way. . . . I try not to be dictative, but my parents would say I am a little more relaxed, but not as relaxed as the Canadian culture. . . . It was like a blend, like I drew from each, but a lot of that stems from how I grew up, my own experiences."

Surprisingly, despite these individual differences, the six basically socialize their children in the same way. This commonality is reflected by what they teach their children as illustrated by the discussion that follows.

3.1. **Content and method**

All the women believe that in order for their children to develop "well rounded" and solid personalities, they, as parents, have to work towards building their children's self esteem. Naaila's standpoint on this issue is as follows:

> "I teach my children to accept themselves, believe in themselves, love themselves before they love anybody, . . . and to feel good about the good things that they do, and to feel when they do something that is not acceptable by society or whatever, to feel that is wrong."

Building on the children's self esteem is a multi dimensional procedure which, among other factors, involves teaching the children about their people, their history, their culture, food, and language. Excerpts from Elda's story substantiate this factor. She maintains:

"Actually, I teach my children African history and culture and how to behave and so on, and their language and their food, . . . their subculture, too. Because . . . knowing your history makes you have a higher self esteem; that's what I think. That's why I think it's very important to know your history. It sort of makes your self esteem to go a little bit higher; but if you don't know your past, you'll have a low self esteem. You have to know yourself."

Elda's conviction about this fact draws from observing the behavior of her sons during and some time after these lessons. Asked if she finds that all what she teaches her children help cultivate their self esteem she replied:

"Yeah, I think it really helps. It does help; and it's quite good for them. You know, I've noticed them. When we start educating them, they seem to be very interested and cooperative; more cooperative than ever. They are so much in the tune and nice. You can see that they become happy."

From the women's perspectives, attainment of self esteem is invaluable not only because it builds on their children's self identity, but also because they believe it will help them cope with many kinds of situations outside the home. Elda gives her own opinion:

"First of all you know, when they are in the class, they can always be answerable to their past history. . . . If they know their culture and their history, then they will interact even better . . . and they will contribute with

their own subculture to the Canadian culture. They can be like spokesmen for Africans, you know."

Veronica too, felt it was important for her children to learn about themselves, their ethnicity and background as a way of "boosting their self esteem at home and encouraging a pride in who they were". However, she, unlike the rest of the women, not only concentrates on teaching her daughters about themselves per se, but to also accept and understand beliefs and customs of other cultures because she thinks that

". . . in order for them to survive as people, and to have good survival skills and adaptability skills and to be comfortable with who they are, they need to learn about other people and things and places."

Supporting these women, Matshidiso, too, believes that building self identity in the child is necessary basically because

"When we talk about African Descent, we know that we look Black, and we are Black. A person who sees you already knows that, and they are going to identify you as such. If you don't know enough about yourself, you are going to be confused about what messages people are sending to you to an extent you don't feel confident with whatever they call you. But if you know who you are and you accept who you are, it doesn't matter how other people perceive you as long as you know who you are. And if we don't give our children that, they don't have a foundation; they don't have anything to stand on. . . . and they know their origin, they know what their people

stand for, they know who their people are, and therefore, with that, they would accept themselves much better."

The statements above are consistent with African centric philosophy. As discussed in the introduction, this philosophy stresses 'self knowledge' of an individual as one of the building blocks of African centricity. The women, too, identify this factor as an inevitable foundation towards the achievement of 'person'. The theme of "an extended self" also runs through their stories. In this case, the self extends beyond the boundaries of sameness, as reflected in African centricity, to include a different environment, including its culture and its people. The women, therefore, teach their children to develop the type of 'self knowledge' that will allow them to carry their identity outside to this different world without losing themselves.

The methods that these women employ to inculcate self esteem show a strong similarity. They range from 'holding a conference in the house', discussions about "past stories", buying and reading African centric books, playing African music, watching and discussing TV shows about African history and culture and encouraging them to participate in African cultural events. In the process, they inculcate self acceptance by 'telling them positive things about themselves" as people of African descent. The objective, according to the mothers, is to counteract the negative images portrayed by the media and "some ignorant" Canadians about Africa or their countries of origin. They also attempt to inculcate a

sense of pride and self worth in their children as individuals, as people of African descent and as a race.

Some women may take drastic measures for this purpose. Naaila took her children out of school and is 'home schooling' them. Her account is as follows:

> "There are many reasons why I took them out of school, but I really felt that they didn't have enough time to learn about where they came from, not only just from my country but beyond that; their culture and specifically I make it a point they learn about that you know, not just general. I become very specific. I teach them about culture, specifically about how children were disciplined and how effective it was, and what was wrong with it, what was right with it, about the intelligence, education, civilization, how their people or people in my country or even in Africa, how they were a civilized country and not as the media portrays them. Because they didn't know. They were taught the wrong things."

The reason why she teaches them "these things" is

> "Because I believe that is the main step in building self esteem. I believe every one identifies with their race and their accomplishments. And we are Black people. If my children can see themselves, I mean not just as individuals but a race, as coming from a race of people that were intelligent, educated, civilized you know, positive in themselves, then this is a basis for gaining self esteem you know. I believe that."

The women also inculcate in their children the value of respect. As discussed earlier, this is the most basic value that the women were taught as children. This value is basically what five women

perceived as one of the most important lessons that they pass over to their children.

> "I would say I try to give them the idea that I am their parent, and I should have a certain amount of control as far as decisions about their safety and livelihood, and so, I demand a certain amount of respect from them: . . . "(Naaila)

She further reiterates the statement:

> "First I raise my children to respect me as their parent, and their father as their parent; and then to respect each other, and themselves, and the outside community."

Agreeing with her is Matshidiso who maintains:

> "On the culture and the beliefs that I've been raised with, I believe that you have to respect adults because they are more wiser; because they've been through that whole and know what they are talking about whenever they say certain things; and I've made my son believe that as his parent, I'll never steer him wrong deliberately."

Adua Konadu regards discipline as a vehicle towards attainment of respect. Following is her response to the question what values she instills in her children:

"Discipline. How to talk to a grown up. If you are doing something wrong, and some grown up sees you and says to you, listen, what you are doing is wrong, and you know it's wrong, you should get away from that, O.K.! . . . discipline is very important to me, you know. They have to be able to know how to talk to their parents, and talk to peers, older person, from a new born baby to an adult. You have to have different levels of talking to them, because they are all different age groups."

The women adjust their parenting in order to suit situations in which they find themselves. This adjustment is demonstrated in the way in which Naaila teaches her children the value of respect. She notes that there is a difference between her and her parents when it comes to this. She maintains:

"But the difference between my parents and I is that I teach my children to give respect where it's earned, and to respect anybody; but if somebody doesn't give you respect, then you don't have to bend over."

Only two women feel they have, in Veronica's words, "lost out to some extent" as far as inculcating the value of respect. Veronica bases her loss on lack of the extended family structure.

". . . because if I wanted to teach them respect of the elderly I would have them experience the elderly, and for me, they haven't done so; and they haven't experienced extended family and interaction with extended family. . ."

Elda's reasons for losing out, on the other hand, point a finger at the Canadian social environment. Apart from the fact that she sees the problem as a Canadian child's way of relating to the elderly, she also blames the media. She explains :

> "You see, the problem is the TV too. You socialize your own children, but the TV socializes your children too."

Too much emphasis on respect for adults on the part of the children may, at times be problematic as is the case with Adua Konadu's children. She has observed that they find it difficult to stand up for themselves in situations where an adult may accuse them of something they did not do. In their mother's words

> "When somebody is [accusing them], they just listen, whether [the accuser is] right or wrong. . . . But sometimes, they stand there and they listen, you know, and it's like, 'I don't know why this person is mad at me because I didn't do that'. Meanwhile [the accuser is] there, screaming at them, you know."

bell hooks (1988), discusses this type of silence, how it is manifested, and its repercussions. She maintains that emphasis on respect and the tendency to discourage children to "talk back" at adults produces unassertive children. Similar arguments which have been made by western authors about Nigerian children have long been challenged as "an invalid conclusion" based on the fact that "there have never been comparative studies carried between [in this case] Nigerian children at work and their counterparts elsewhere in

the world" (Amadi, 1982:55, citing Sefolo). Instead, inculcation of the value of respect in children is viewed as a positive factor. A child brought up with this value, as argued, will "automatically respect any elder regardless of tribe and race", a characteristic which, "if adopted world wide", may offset ethnic or racial discrimination. (Amadi, 1982:55, citing Sefolo). Fortunately, Adua Konadu and her daughters are working on their children's assertiveness to overcome the girls' silence.

The mothers also teach their children how to cope with racism. Racial issues are part and parcel of the women's relationships with their children. All the women had been confronted with the issue at some point during their parenting. What is common among them is the approach to the issue, which is to wait until their children bring up the issue. Matshidiso's response demonstrates this factor. She relates:

> "The way I do it is always wait until something happens, so that he will be able to relate what I'm telling him to the issue. So I don't sit down with him formally and say, this is what people are going to treat you like, and this is how you should respond. What I do is I always wait for the situation to happen; and for example, just like where people are unable to get along racially."

Such racial incidents usually occur at schools and daycare centers. The women's stories reveal various dynamics in which the racism manifests itself. First, racism may be blatant. Their children may experience racism directly as individuals in the form of "name calling" and labeling. This type of racism appears to be the

most common one the women deal with. All of the women's children experienced it. They have been called "racial slurs" like "nigger" and "buckweed".

Second, there is institutionalized racism which is a subtle, indirect form of racism occurring within institutions of power. This may be in the form of policies which exclude or marginalize full recognition and/or participation of certain racial or cultural groups (Billingsley, 1968:152; Krauter & Davies, 1978:1, 2). In the case of these women and their children, this type of racism may occur when the school curriculum fails to accommodate the needs of minority children. Racism may also occur when the victimized children tend to believe and internalize racial messages they receive, and later acting them out upon themselves. Veronica's daughters "have had a few problems" with each of the three forms of racism. This is what she said regarding the issue:

> "First of all [institutionalized] I thought that they didn't receive an appreciation of their own culture; it was always Scottish night or Irish night or something like that. . . . And then [direct] they braided their hair, and for a while you wouldn't believe this in Vancouver; but it caused such an upheaval in the school because they were told to wash it out, you know, to wash it out, to get it out, to get rid of it and all that sort of stuff. . . . So, they had incidents and they had children ask them what is it like to be Black you know. . . . And then [internalized] the other thing that kind of gave me a stir was when my daughter wanted contact lenses that were blue, and I kinda think, oh, dear, you know, we have an identity crisis or something here."

Internalized racism, which is the product of the first two types of racism, seems to threaten a child's self esteem and self value. The last statement about contact lenses demonstrates a situation where a child's 'self identity' might not be solid enough to withstand outside pressure to be like the rest.

The women dealt with blatant racism in different ways. Adua Konadu took her children out of the situation by having them registered at what I shall term a 'race friendly' school. Two of the women armed their children with the tools of dealing with the situation themselves. Dealing with the issue is not an easy task; for some women it is a very complicated, highly emotional and controversial matter. Sometimes it involves acting against one's principles and values, due to the helplessness that accompanies this unpleasant experience. Duduza, displayed an expression of sadness and disappointment at the way she handled the issue. After repeated complaints from her son that some kids at school called him a nigger, she felt she had no alternative but to act contrary to her values which are:

> ". . . what I teach them is positive. I don't put othe people down because of the way they are, because of their color; I just make sure that my kids they know that they're equal as like any one else."

Yet she found herself having to make a "difficult" choice:

> "You know, he couldn't even defend himself there and then. He came to me; so, the only thing I found you know, I said to him..., to do..., to put them you know, to

> discipline those kids whether physical or whatever, or verbally. It's fine with me, because they'll be..., there's a time when a child has to prove himself that you know, you can't insult me like that; . . ."

Her response also seems to be connected to her past experience in that as she explains,

> "On the other side you know I'm from [a racist country] where we've been insulted many times you know, called [racist names], so I just want [my children] to be strong."

This mother's situation portrays multifaceted and conflicting dynamics. She finds herself confronted with a situation which does not leave her with any other alternative but to teach conflicting values. Her situation also reveals that there is little support from the social system or perhaps other parents to reinforce the same values as she holds- to teach what is positive and equality. She also finds herself confronted with a dilemma, whether to protect her child at the expense of her values or to do vice versa. This dilemma is also complicated by her "past experience" with racism, which taught her to bravely confront any form of racism including defending herself "there and then". Her situation suggests the possibility of cultural conflict, and also questions the responsibility of the school regarding racism.

Matshidiso felt "helpless" because she did not understand a specific racial terminology. Her son came home from daycare 'at the

church downtown' one day claiming that the children called him 'buckweed'. She related her discussion with her son as follows:

> "And he was very angry with that. He doesn't know what buckweed is. And I said why are you angry? And he said no..., because they were pointing at my hair and what have you. . . . And I for one I remember not knowing for sure what buckweed means until I found out from the very same parents who have been here longer than me; . . . And I said to him, if you don't know what they mean why are you getting angry; and he said because they were laughing at me. And I said, you know when people are laughing at you and you don't know what they are laughing at, if you are not saying or doing anything wrong you shouldn't even worry about it, you shouldn't even grace it. But he was very upset with something like that. And I remember being helpless in helping him because I didn't understand what buckweed meant at that time. . . . And I said, you don't react to something you don't know. . . . If they are pointing at your hair, it's different form theirs, so what. We're all different.. . . He's still questioning your identity that you're born with that kind of hair. You have to accept that you were born with it, or do something with it if you want. You have a choice. But at the same time you should know that's their opinion and let them have it, and you shouldn't react to it that way."

She believes that

> ". . . if he knew who he was, whatever they called him at that time, he would have [dealt with the situation differently]. . . That is why I think educating our children and teaching them about who we are, is going to give them that foundation where they are going to say, of course, as Blacks we were born with that kind of hair."

She realized that being emotional would not help solve the problem, nor would it help to build her son's "self confidence". She consulted with other women who have been in Canada longer and had similar experiences, she "educated myself on what 'buckweed' meant", and sought a more effective way of addressing the situation. In her words,

> "It's almost like if I'm helpless, therefore I cannot give my child self confidence. But I let some time go by and then I sat down and talked to him about it when I had more information. By then I had gained enough help with the information I was given to help him. This is why I say it also means that I had to go through a transformation of deciding how I deal with this 'buckweed'; and that is a difficult transition. Like I said when you are in a new culture you'll have to go through certain changes."

The stories of the latter two women reveal both similarities and differences in the ways of dealing with the problem. The similarity, as discussed earlier, lies in the fact that both women, like the rest of my co-researchers, teach their children to withstand racism by way of building their children's self esteem. However, they tend to confront specific situations in ways unique to themselves, depending on their individual perception of a situation. In this case, the first woman appears to see the perpetrator as a problem which needs to be taken care of; hence her advice to her son to defend himself by dealing with the perpetrator. The second woman seems to perceive the problem as a matter of a weakness in her son's 'self-knowledge' which is unable to stand up for itself. As

a result, she, therefore, insists on working even harder to build her son's self esteem so that his self identity becomes strong enough to withstand future pressure. She, therefore, advocates education and transformation of one's self as ways of dealing with racial issues.

Another way of dealing with this issue, which I found to be painful, is silence. This is the case with Elda. She, herself, has experienced racism, and is aware that her eldest son, in particular, also experienced it and even made a movie about it as part of a school project. However, unlike the latter two women who discussed the issue with their children after they claimed that they had been racially victimized, she does not talk about it. She attributes part of the reason for her silence to how she grew up. She maintains that although she had been raised in a racist environment, she does not remember her elders discussing racism openly, a trait that she recognizes as having spilled over to even include her son who is "not very communicative with me regarding that issue because I don't know, maybe he's like me." With a hurtful tone, she gave one more reason for her silence which conveys a sense of protectiveness toward her children.

> "Because I don't want to talk about things that will make them feel bad and so on, things that will make them feel frustrated. I don't want to share my pain with them . . ."

Two women shared the pain they feel when their children are racially victimized. Duduza related it in this way:

> For me as a mother it's very difficult you know. I'd prefer those things to be said to me because I will know what to do, and I will know how to defend myself there and then."

The pain may even turn into a nightmare if the mother herself has had previous experiences of racial discrimination. This is how Elda communicates the hurt in relation to her children:

> "The thing is that I always have problems outside. So, from my own personal experience, it's a nightmare; it can be a nightmare for me if the kids could go through what I go through sometimes when I go out."

The fact that women do not discuss racial issues until they happen does not imply that they do not think and worry about them. Veronica found herself constantly thinking and worrying about racism, especially when she first arrived in Canada.

> "When I came here, I worried a lot about my kids because the first thing that worried me was, here I am with a black child and there's no other Black soul that I could see, and no other black children. And I don't know how she's going to be socialized in this society, and how she would feel about herself. And what do I do about that. How can I integrate her, but keep her self esteem and her identity intact. And this was really a big worry for me, when I came. And the other worry was that at school I felt that my kid, . . . being black, was a prime target for kids who might have poor social behavior like kids into drugs or things like that; . . . So those were constantly, constantly on my mind."

Elda's story reflects the same concern.

". . . sometimes the racial discrimination in this country, I think it's not being addressed very well. So, sometimes I feel my children might be vulnerable at school and anywhere. . . . I think my children are more vulnerable although we are visible minorities you know; but sometimes the police would go after a Black person more than a white person. So I don't think anyone worries more than I do from my own experience because for instance Black people are followed all the time. . . . That's why I'm trying my best to always do the right thing."

The women also find themselves having to deal with issues of dating and sexuality. From an African centric point of view as I have experienced it, and as will be revealed in Elda's story, issues of sexuality may be a very sensitive topic. For this reason, I did not ask women questions about the issue. The issue just came up during conversations with three of the women. The women's stories reveal different perspectives of dealing with the issue.

Adua Konadu, does not allow her daughters to have boyfriends yet However, she discusses such issues with them as a form of education. This is what she said in this regard:

"We are talking about it when they see somebody they like and I do; when we're watching TV, and we see somebody who's nice looking we say oh, what a nice looking boy, and we make comments, and they come in and say, oh mummy, do you know who [one of her daughters] has a crush on? And we joke about it and laugh about it, and I say, we can only talk about it, that's O.K., but let them understand that you are not ready yet to date. And if they see somebody they like, they will say, you see that boy, I think he's cute; and we laugh about it and that's it. But as far as having a boyfriend, coming here, sitting here and kissing every two minutes, no."

Matshidiso, like Adua Konadu, talks about sexuality issues with her son; but unlike Adua Konadu, she does not have a problem with her son dating. This factor is implied in what she said about a discussion with her son

> ". . . he told me why he is no longer going to keep up the relationship with a girlfriend, . . . and he said he couldn't tell me about this because he was afraid I was going to get upset because he thought I liked the girl . . ."

Elda, unlike the two women, cannot imagine herself talking about sex with her sons. This is what she said in this respect:

> "Yeah, for instance, I know my friends keep on asking me if I'm talking about sex with my fourteen year old. It's like wow! I never talk about that with my son [shock and disbelief]. I can never do that. I can't. I just can't see myself talking to my son about sexual activities, and whether he's doing things or not. And my husband is even more strong on that side; he doesn't want to talk about it at all; he doesn't. Yeah, it's very hard. . . . We can't even mention . . . 'kissing' or anything in front of him, anything like beyond that, . . ."

Despite Elda's strong reservations about this issue of sexuality and dating, she may find herself overcome by the urgency of the situation. This is evidenced when a life threatening situation arose, and she was compelled by the situation to talk to her son about meningitis. Ultimately, 'maternal love' overpowered her silence, and she told her son not to "kiss and stuff". She admitted that her

silence over sexuality issues is strongly tied to the way she was raised. She said that when she was growing up, she "didn't even learn about" such issues. Her upbringing in this regard has influenced her so much that she does not think she will ever change.

The women also inculcate in their children the African centric philosophy of non-materialism. Asked about the type of adults they expect their children to become, none of the women expressed a need for accumulation of material things. Naaila responded in the following way:

> "Well, I hope for them to be independent. I hope for them to be a benefit to whatever community they are in, you know, to be somebody who is needed, not necessarily important, but valued, and a benefit instead of being a burden. being liable or something like that; and to have a skill, whether academic or technical, or whatever, that they can feel proud of themselves you know."

Matshidiso had this to say:

> "I'm hoping that he is going to be a well-rounded citizen who would be able to conduct himself in a way that he'd be proud and would be confident in who he is given the multicultural planes we are in, being of African origin. . . . and comfortable with who he is [like herself]. That's what I want to achieve. And the second thing is . . . to be what he wants to be in terms of education."

Elda has the following expectations about her sons:

> ". . . I hope that they would remember their language and their culture, their subculture. I'm sure that they will

remember the Canadian culture, but I hope they will remember their subculture too."

Veronica 's expectations is that at eighteen years, her daughters should

". . . be able to make your decisions for yourself. So I should have raised you so that at eighteen you would have acquired good decision making skills and that you could live on your own. . . . and experimenting with money management job et cetera before going to university. And my aim is you can survive on your own, have survivability skills and that you will go on to university and then I feel that's my cut off point."

Furthermore

"I teach them that over and above everything that it's the person that you are that is important rather than what you have; because I see so much of the what you have business here. So I teach them that being a whole total person, a good person is more important."

Duduza's answer was:

"I just hope you know, they will turn positive to life, and they will respect everyone.

Adua Konadu hopes her daughter will turn out to

"Be good, you know, be able to meet people and talk to people without judging them, you know; be able to make friends and don't look down on people saying that oh, she doesn't wear decent clothes, so I don't talk to the person or she's more decent than me; be able to talk to anybody you want to talk to. It doesn't matter how they look or what they do; talk to them; and be whatever they want to be."

Even where the women wish that their children be educated, their definition of its value in the lives of their children reflects the non-materialistic view. This is how some of the women responded to the question why they stress academic achievement in the lives of their children:

"I think everybody, if you can, you need it. It's very important, because you know, it broadens your mind. You learn more. It doesn't make you a good person you know, but you learn more and you have so many resources."

Adua Konadu 's reason is that her daughters

"get themselves a good job, and live comfortably, have a decent life."

Another value which the women instill in their children is a sense of responsibility. The way in which they do this reflects the parenting choices discussed earlier, that is, the pre Canadian or the Canadian way or a blend of both ways. Four women mentioned that

they expect their children to help with household chores, just like they were socialized. In fact, during my interview visit with Duduza, I witnessed her daughter help do the dishes. Naaila expects her children to be responsible "from a very early age . . . like cooking and you know, doing things that might be dangerous to them or damage my kitchen . . ." just like the way she has been raised; however, conforming to the Canadian way, and partly a safety issue, she does not let them go to the corner store "and things that I will be worried about them . . ."

3.2. **Discipline**

The women have various ways and perspectives on how to discipline their children, although the common thread is "talking" with their children, reasoning with them, setting down rules, being firm, showing them their faults, and explaining reasons behind the discipline. Some of them have used spanking, although they do not advocate it. This is Naaila's account:

> "I believe in reason with children and talking to them because it works for me, and in taking away privileges; and I believe that spanking is good sometimes, but not the same as my parents. My priority when I'm disciplining my children, my priority is to talk and reason, and show them why this discipline is necessary."

Asked as to how she differentiates spanking from child abuse, she replied:

> I would say that child abuse is lack of control of the person giving out this form of discipline. If the child is not gaining anything positive from the spanking, you know; if you don't see an improvement in behavior and if it physically stays on the child's body, you know. There's degrees you know, like I wouldn't beat my kids with a stick on the head or mark the skin you know; I mean, but I don't use that often. . . . I'm finding that it's less necessary, you know, that I can do without it completely because I don't think it's effective. It gives the least positive results."

Veronica, too, seems to share the same perspective with Naaila as regards spanking, that is, using spanking although they do not believe in it. They also seem to equate their situation as parents and administrators of the discipline with that of their childhood as receivers of the discipline. The following is her account:

> ". . . and I didn't believe in the smacking business too much, although my kids have been smacked. But I thought that was excessive in the Caribbean."

Based on the stories of the two women, it appears that both made a conscious choice based on two factors. One factor is the willingness to adopt a Canadian value that they perceive as positive. The other factor is that the women seem to have evaluated this practice based on their personal experiences with their children. They both realize that the practice was 'excessive' in their home country, and, as Naaila maintains, that it is not effective. As a result, they consciously chose to either abstain from practicing it, or use it sparingly.

Sometimes women find themselves in conflict with themselves. They try hard not to spank their children out of respect and fear of Canadian child protective and apprehension laws. Duduza is one such woman.

> You can't discipline the kids physically, because they will just take them from you. It's one of the things that just killed me."

Matshidiso, too, is constrained by these laws from disciplining her son physically. Matshidiso is the same woman who heard about children being able to call 911 before she came to Canada. Her account is as follows:

> ". . . for me because I cannot do that, I..., yeah, the only thing that I see is that I had a very strong mother who was always disciplining us; and I see a difference in me wanting sometimes to do that when I get angry with him, especially when he was younger. But I saw myself refraining from that because I thought if he was to call 911, I'll be in trouble and they will take him away from me. And that put fear. Now I'm a fearful mother instead of a relaxed mother like my mother was. I think my mother conducted herself on the basis that she knew that she had the right to take care of us and discipline us the way she felt was right or the way she was brought up. But with me it's different. I feel myself constrained and having to really watch the way I do things with him because it's like there's a third eye watching what I'm doing, so there's a difference."

Disciplining the children is not just a matter of talking, but also of expression. This factor becomes evident in how Adua Konadu talks to her fourteen year old daughter regarding going out on Friday night to be like her friends. This is how she conveys the message:

> "But sometimes she tries to get away with something because friends do, . . and I say, . . . and it's Friday night and I say . . . , you don't have to go out Friday night; because you're only fourteen years old. You're not going anywhere. If that's what they say, that they go out Friday night, that's their problem. When it's time for you to go out Friday night, then you will. Because I wouldn't even let you go out Friday night. As far as you can go is to the mall. But, where are you gonna go, because every body knows, hey, it's Friday night, I have to go out. You are not going anywhere. If you try to get away with this thing- but she doesn't even do it any more. She's happy, -and when it's time for you to go, you are only fourteen. You're not old enough to go. Don't be in a hurry to be an adult. Just be your age. When the time comes for you to do what you have to do, there's a lot more fun to have. You can do whatever you want. But until now, you just have to be a kid. Enjoy every minute of it."

Some women, although they believe in talking to their children, still have some reservations about some of the disciplinary measures common in the Canadian society. They base their argument, among other factors, on the way in which they were raised. Duduza's account about her son on this issue is as follows:

> "He tells me how to discipline him. He tells me to send him to his bedroom, which I tell him that at home there was no way in which your mom will say that go and stay

in your bedroom. First of all I never had a bedroom. We were seven in one bedroom."

Matshidiso elaborates as follows:

"The only slight difference is that some of the people who have been here longer, have now adopted more of the Canadian way of discipline and things like, you know, cutting off the phone privileges or curfews to their kids. I've seen them adopt that more often, whereas with me, I'm still holding to talking to a child and say I want you to see this, and I want you to know that it's wrong, and I want you to tell yourself that you are not going to do it again, and you have to correct it. So this is where the difference is that to me I'm still held fast on saying the child has to have his face shown to the problem instead of saying yes you did this now, and here's the punishment, go to your room. So I still haven't been able to adopt that go-to-your-room kind of discipline."

She cited one incident as an example where she would not discipline her child the 'Canadian way' as was expected by her son's teacher. This is her account:

"The example I can give is he arrived at school three times late and then they sent me a note. And then I was supposed to sign a disciplinary note, and send it back. And I refused to do that with him and said you know what, if I sign this note you are gonna do it again and expect me to sign another note, and do it again; and said I'm refusing to endorse your going late to school, therefore it means you are not going to go to school late anymore. And I talked to the teacher. I wrote a note to the teacher and said, I think he's going to think it's a trend to us to sign notes, so let's not even start signing any notes. He knows he's not supposed to come late and he's not going to come late. And ever since then that has

stopped. . . . I put my foot down and said I'm not going to allow one chance of it happening again."

Matshidiso's last account shares a common trait with that given by Adua Konadu about her fourteen year old daughter's insistence on going out on Friday night. Both accounts depict a situation of non negotiation, which means that, there are certain situations where the parents do not accept any form of input from their children when it comes to certain issues which they deem crucial. 'Reasoning out with the kids' at times like these is ruled out.

Duduza's account also follows the same perspective of putting her foot down. She maintains:

"Let me say I don't let him do whatever he wants to do. He has to know that there are rules in the house. And he has to follow the rules whether he likes it or not. He can do what he wants when he is in his house, you know, I tell him. He knows that- both of them. If you leave here [have your own place] then you can do whatever you want to do. I believe in any house there is a rule, whether you like it or not."

Adua Konadu, too, reiterates the same point of living by the rules, not only in terms of her daughters but also including the foster children. Her account is as follows:

"When she [her elder daughter] tells me Mummy I'm going out, I want to know exactly where she is going, where I can phone her, and when she's gonna be back. We do that with the foster boys. When they come they

don't appreciate it, but after a while they realize: Gee, we have to live by the house rules. And they do."

4. THE WOMEN'S REFLECTIONS ON THE MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTION

The women's reflections on their relationship with their children varies. Matshidiso's response was an immediate "excellent", Adua Konadu and Naaila's response was "good", Veronica's was "fairly good" and Elda's was "fair". Duduza's response varied with each child. While she perceived her relationship with her daughter as "good", she, on the contrary, maintained that her relationship with her son was strained.

The women's responses were always accompanied by some of explanation. For example Matshidiso's explanation for her judgment was:

". . . because I hear him say things that are so sensible and so matured that I get so impressed that..., and I have to remind myself that he is a fifteen year old child."

The fact that her son's teacher once remarked positively about his reasoning maturity is an added factor to Matshidiso's positive response about her relationship with her son.

Adua Konadu's response is based on the communication factor that she and her daughters share. Her explanation is as follows:

"We are able to talk. We talk to each other, and we laugh together; we tease each other together, and we

just have fun and laugh. We talk, we dress together, they get into my clothes, . . ."

Veronica's response is based on the developmental stage in which her daughters are. Her daughters are teenagers and although, according to her, they have always been very close

". . . right now we are at the point of separating from each other. So at the moment it might appear as though we are not so close. However, I don't think it's a bad relationship."

Elda, on the other hand, uses two different measuring sticks in her assessment. Although she views her relationship with her children as "fair", she adds:

"But sometimes from my own perception, I look at them from the way in which I was raised. So, then I find them very uncooperative if I look at them like that."

This ambivalence is a recurring theme in the women's stories, especially in relation to their children's behavior.

Duduza sees the relationship problem with her son emanating from two factors. The first is that she and her son are just beginning to get to know each other. She had never lived with him until two years before. The second, as she sees it, is related to the attitudes of children in Canada:

". . or it's because of friends you know; because here, I find that kids here when they are too close to their parents, to their mom, their friends will start laughing at them. They call them names."

Lastly, she locates the third reason within the Canadian way of physically relating to children. Her account in this regard is as follows:

"We believe touching for us is not a crime. We touch kids- like even my son when I was at home, I was going to give him a bath. But now I'm in another country. Now it will be abuse. I'm confused. If he's taking a bath it's like, can I go or what, because you know, I'm not free with my kids. No, I'm not free with my kids."

Duduza's statement reveals how, in her own perception, lack of physical contact might strain the relationship between a mother and her children.

Reflecting on the behavior of their children, three women seemed to be satisfied with the behavior of their children. The remaining three had mixed feelings about their children's behavior. These feelings are characterized by two contrasting themes, namely, the Canadian standard versus the African centric standard. These themes are also determined by whether or not the behavior occurs in the home or outside the home. These patterns are demonstrated by the following statements made by the women. The statements that follow reflect an ambivalence based on the two cultures.

"The behavior of my kids? I think unfortunately, although I try to instill my own values and so on, it seems to me like the society took control of a lot of it. And ER..., so, looking at them now I don't think that they are that much different at this point in time from North American kids. They are actually in their behavior the same." (Veronica)

"It's too bad, according to my description. I know that they might not see themselves like that, but sometimes I see them as disrespectful, and financially demanding. I know they're not aware of that. . . . Actually, ever since I came here, . . . and my kids are very compatible. They are just the same as Canadians you know. They behave like Canadians, like Canadian children. Sometimes, you know, . . . , I get shocked sometimes, like the way they respond to me and so on; so that my children are just O.K.; they have adjusted; . . . and their behavior is just good." (Elda)

Naaila's comment is representative of the in-the-home versus outside-the-home contradiction. She maintains:

"Well, I will have to compare to what I see in other families and I think that I am fortunate enough to have children who are well behaved when they go outside, when they visit other people and their interaction with other people. Their behavior is a little different from home because of course they're more relaxed on the street you know, they do what they want. The most disrespect they ever show is out there. But I would say that they are very well behaved." (Naaila)

The women were also asked to reflect on the feedback that they get from their children regarding the values and beliefs they inculcate in them. The feedback is also contradictory, combining

both the positive and the negative. For instance, what might begin as negative feedback might, in the long run, turn out to be positive. Veronica, who finds her children sometimes lacking interest in what she teaches them, has just observed a change in attitude in her elder daughter. She maintains her daughter

> ". . . reads a lot of the books that I had bought, for instance, that she had not thought of reading. She reads them now that she is on her own."

Sometimes children's responses vary according to situations. This pattern is evident in the case of all the five women who have been asked to comment on this issue. Children may, on one occasion, respond negatively to their mothers' perspectives; yet given a different scenario, respond positively. The statements Elda made earlier about her children's conduct that they "don't listen", are "uncooperative" and relate to her "at the same level" reflect this tendency in that while on the one hand, she finds her children responding contrary to what she teaches them, she , on the other hand, finds them occasionally exhibiting a positive response on specific issues especially immediately after they have held discussions or a "conference" about their African heritage. The same scenario is experienced by other women. Naaila's experience is supportive of this situation:

> "What they say to me, a lot of the old ways, the culture, they laugh at it, you know. They think it's funny. They don't think it's applied now you know. Even though they

see the effect of it you know- what it produces, they say it doesn't apply here. But they are also fascinated by the truth- of what it really was like as opposed to what they have been taught you know, out there."

Adua Konadu 's response, too reflects contradictions.

"Sometimes they feel that it's like, oh..., you did that, or, things like that happen, and it's like oh...; and some of them they like you know."

The women also reflected on a variety of fears in relation to their children. Two distinct themes run through the women's fears These are related to the Canadian social environment and individual family structure.

Fears based on the social environment reveal two dynamics. The first dynamic concerns the social structure which is beyond the mothers' or the children's control. Identified under this category are concerns about racism and the children's safety. Elda conveyed her fear in relation to racism

"I think that my children are more vulnerable although...We are visible minorities you know; but sometimes the police would go after a Black person more than a White person. So, I don't think anybody worries as much as I do from my own experience because for instance, when ER... Black people are the ones that are followed all the time. The police are always after us looking for trouble. You know, Black people are regarded as bad people."

The following statements relate to the safety of children. Duduza made the following statement:

> "Losing them. I'm just scared. [loosing them] to people outside, you know, to their friends. It's just you know, I get lots of information. Children here, they are being kidnapped, they are being killed. So, all those things you know, make me think on that line that maybe I'm gonna lose my kids one day."

Elda responded is terrified by the thought of losing her children.

> ". . . losing my children just because sometimes I don't have money and I can't do things for my children; and you know, in Canada children can be adopted by any other parent- like strangers sometimes can just take your child and raise the child, you know, without being blood relatives and so on. So, you know, it haunts me to think my son can be mothered by somebody who doesn't even know him, not being a blood relative. That's not a common thing in my culture. It really is, you know, sometimes it's a nightmare for me to think about that. Because I know I'm a student and my husband doesn't work; and sometimes we don't have enough money in the house and you know, we can lose our children any time and you know I'm thinking a lot that one day they will go away and someone would like to take over their lives. I have heard about such incidents."

The second aspect under fears emanating from the social environment concerns outside pressure, specifically how the children might respond to such pressure.

Naaila's response in this regard is as follows:

"There are just fears for my children to lose their self respect and their self esteem and become downtrodden and don't believe in themselves. . . . My children losing their self respect and becoming involved in anything that is self destructive. Because I see so many Canadian children having to go through this experience of low self esteem."

Matshidiso has the same fear, too.

". . . but if we don't keep up being strong with each other, he is easily going to be influenced by what is going on outside by peer pressure, group pressure, novelties or whatever new things he wants to be because when he comes to clothes, I see him having no direction; he wants to wear certain clothes."

Adua Konadu, too, has the same fear

"It's drugs and alcohol, especially drugs . . . ; but drugs, that's what I'm afraid of because I'm not everywhere with them, I don't go to school with them. So, that's what I fear most . . . that's my greatest fear, peer pressure. That's what I'm afraid of; that's what I always pray that she'll have a mind of her own to say that, no, I'm not going to do this just because my friends are doing it. . . . there's always people pressuring you saying oh, you're chicken, you're this, why don't you try, and that's what I'm afraid of."

Veronica, in addition to the fear of drugs, has other fears. Below follows her statement.

> "Well, for me the most immediate fear is that they don't go to university because that for, that is one of my cut off things, ER..., that I should raise them ER..., that they should go to university and I cut off there. And I always fear that they may not. Of course, I always fear drugs, and things like that, and alcohol and smoking and stuff, . . . Of course I think about pregnancy too."

Individual women's family structure also play a big role in shaping individual women's fears. Based on this, Matshidiso adds another dynamic to her fears:

> "I am scared that as my child goes through teenage life as quietly as he is right now, being the only child . . . I think he's going to be a loner, and in this country, the outcome of a loner scares me. And the other thing is that it's just the three of us, myself, my friend and him, and we don't have an extended family and therefore he's missing out on interaction."

Matshidiso's fear about her son's loneliness is compounded by the fact that her son does not seem enthusiastic about making friends,

> "he has that tendency of not carrying through with his promises to other people. When he promises other kids to meet with them, I see him not being interested in following it through; he'd rather call and cancel the appointments."

The aspect of family structure seems to have also shaped Veronica's other fear as revealed by her statement:

> "The other fear is that being a single parent can be a process that can repeat itself. So I worry about their lives, about whether they will be single parents, too, or whether they will be able to interact with men because this was a female house for many, many years, and how this interaction will influence the kind of life they will have."

The above findings on the women's fears, further reveal a unique pattern based on a different culture. The Canadian social environment as an environment unfamiliar to these women seems to arouse fears which, according to the women, are unlikely to be of importance in their countries of origin. The tendency by the women to use the phrases "in Canada", "but here" in relation to their experiences reflects this factor. Adua Konadu's statement illustrates this point. Commenting about fears in relation to drugs, she says:

> ". . . when I went home four years ago, there was no such thing as kids doing drugs. They don't even know what it is. . . . So, if I were home, I don't think I would have this kind of fear; but here that's not it."

The tendency to compare makes their experiences unique. Whereas Canadian born and raised mothers may experience the same sociological concerns such as peer influence about their children (Bernhardt, 1970:138), they, unlike my co-researchers,

are unlikely to have a different geographical or cultural perspective to compare with. In addition, people from the dominant culture are unlikely to experience racism.

5. EXPERIENCES WITH FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

The school emerged as the main formal institution with which the women have had personal interaction regarding their children, with the school counselors as the prominent interaction figure.

Veronica, Elda and Duduza were each called in at school to see a school counselor regarding their children's behavior. Veronica did not specify what the problem was, but Duduza and Elda had to see school counselors because their sons had been involved in fights. Duduza did not comment on the discussion with the counselor. Elda found the meeting productive. She thought the school counselor

> "was very helpful because she even made another appointment with us just to check up and see if there is any improvement."

However, she was shocked by the counselor's stereotypical assumption which

> "related the whole thing to maybe they thought we had problems in the house and so on, . . ."

Another shock is related to a cultural difference in the perception of privacy. Elda was shocked that the counselor discussed the problem in the presence of the child concerned. She

was also startled by the way in which the counselor perceived the whole issue of fighting, which differs from her own perception. The following is her explanation:

> "She was saying no matter what, my son is not allowed to hit other kids; no matter how upset he is, you know, even if the other kid is wrong. If the other kid hits him, he's not supposed to hit him back; he's supposed to go somewhere else; which is very funny you know. I remember back in my country, I can't remember anything like that, that when somebody hits you, you are not supposed to hit back. . . . but you know, the way the conditions are here, it's very, very, you know, can be risky to your child if he likes fighting. . . . Right now I know what I'm gonna teach my child so that he can socialize better with other kids outside there, and he can interact with them. But before, I didn't know about the rules and regulations."

Elda's story illustrates that she is willing to work hard to adapt to her new culture. Her willingness to adapt is also conveyed by her readiness to accept another meeting with the counselor "if there was anything going on." It also illustrates that it is important that immigrant women receive information necessary to make adaptation as easy as possible.

Veronica's experience with her daughter's school counselor reveals a shade of mistrust based on stereotypes inherent in the services. This fact seems to have contributed to her reluctance about seeking professional help regarding her daughters. She maintains:

> "There's also the school psychologist; however, I sort of have a sense of mistrust there, so I avoid that. . . . sort of makes me nervous. And also I felt that schools quite often they jump on negatives with the kids. So, for our kids . . . they will utilize that negative image. They've already got the negative image in their mind, and if you can back it up then you've lost."

She would rather not consult with the school counselor anymore because of this mistrust. The mistrust, however, seems to be directed only at the individual counselor in that she is willing to discuss issues with "other individuals" at her daughter's school. Duduza, too, shares the same feeling of mistrust; however, unlike Veronica whose mistrust is selective, she is not prepared to consult with any formal institution regarding parenting for a different reason.

> "Because what will happen? I might lose my kids very easily. . . . because what they do now, they believe the kids- whatever the kids tell them. And then me, they don't believe me as a parent anymore."

The rest of the women did not mention having had any contact with counselors. They have, however, utilized other forms of parenting resources like parenting courses and programs. Although the women think that these services are helpful, they feel they are inadequate in that they represent the dominant culture's perspective. Not all the women, however, concur with the observation. Adua Konadu is satisfied with children's social programs available. She thinks ". . . it's good". She does not,

however, use any parenting resources because she has not encountered "any major problem" with her children.

6. MISSING FACTORS

Amongst other factors like absence of fathers in the case of the two single mothers, and absence of cultural rituals in the case of one women, the women identified the extended family as the most crucial factor missing in their parenting. It is not only the presence of the extended family per se that the women miss, but in particular, the supportive role and the contributions that go with it. The following statements reveal the strong feelings the women have towards the extended family:

> "Just the contribution of my relatives and my extended family back home, which I value toward upbringing of my children. Now that it's not there, I think there's something like an empty spot that needs to be fulfilled. . . . Actually, I just miss my extended family and unfortunate enough I know there's nothing I can do about it. But I miss my extended family." (Elda)

> " . . . and we don't have an extended family and therefore he's missing out on interaction. . . . one thing that I know is that I was raised in the midst of so many people who were my support system. . . . But I think my son doesn't have that. He only has me and that's why he has to evaluate whether he should talk to me about an issue or not. . . . My son does not have avenues where he can plant his emotions when I did." (Matshidiso)

> "Oh, yes, oh, yes; that total area there of the family and the extended family and the input that they could have had as people from extended family and all that. That,

that's the saddest thing for me you know; that's all ER... missing thing." (Veronica)

"I miss the extended family idea, of not just being myself, but looking out and introducing the raising up of children, being responsible, every body getting involved. I miss that. . . . my kids having grandparents and uncles and aunts around them; people who could share my beliefs you know; because I feel that it's a big responsibility and I wish I had more people around me. Well, I feel that my children would have more to draw from, different personalities and experiences to make them stronger, stronger personalities; more as a guide you know, because they grow up with me and their father. Basically we are the only people giving input, and I feel like it's a little unfair because we're just two people you know, and only have that much inside you know; . . . if they had their grand parents, and their aunts and their uncles to have so much more to draw from." (Naaila)

To compensate for the lack of extended family other women have devised alternatives in order to provide their children with 'the extended family environment'. For example, Matshidiso has two friends that her son can talk to about issues which he does not want to discuss with her, and to sleep over whenever he feels too angry to be around his mother. Adua Konadu on the other hand, maintains that she tries to perform those duties that would be performed by the extended family herself. Some women, however, have not been able to extend themselves for reasons varying from inability to discuss family issues with people who are not blood relatives to lack of culturally sensitive organizations in issues of parenting. Veronica used to reach out to her parents constantly. She maintains,

". . . used to talk to my parents a lot; I mean initially. I used to have huge phone bills because I talked to them a lot of times, and that was a lot of help."

7. TRANSFORMATIONS, CHANGES AND ADJUSTMENTS

The women's parenting experiences have effected various significant changes and transformations in the women. Such changes may be attributed to changes in perception of parenting and motherhood, the women's childhood experiences and accommodation of Canadian culture or a combination of these factors. In relation to changes in perception of motherhood, Veronica stated:

" I think a lot of women in the Caribbean are sort of martyrs to everybody you know, husbands, children, whatever, you know, self sacrificing; so you sort of start on this self sacrificing role because it is what you saw your parents do, or you saw your mother do it and others do it and so on. But as time goes by, certainly at this stage of things, I don't really want to be doing much of that anymore. . . . In the beginning I was a martyr mother, you know. I literally...; I felt part of my job was to run myself ragged completely . . . as time went on I found out that kids are people, too, and they have their own lives and I sort of began to separate myself and tell myself that I would do this and this, but I would not do over and above that. And as time goes on I cut down more; I set more and more limits. So in actual fact I'm doing less."

Naaila had the following to add;

I used to think that a mother had to be providing you know, warmth and shelter and all that for the child and discipline the child, but I found that being friendly towards the children, and listen to what they have to

> say. . . , I didn't have too much to say. I had to listen to what [my parents] had to say; . . . so I give my children that benefit I didn't have, and I find I'm doing very well listening to them. Because I remembered my experience of my parents being dictators and not trying to see what I was feeling; . . . and especially my older children have become adolescents and I think I see them struggling. and I feel drawn back to this feeling of suppression I had, and I didn't want them to feel like that, but just give them a little more freedom to be expressive, you know. It has helped a great deal."

Naaila's statement reflects a combination of two factors, that is, a change in perception of motherhood and her childhood experience. Having not being happy about being dictated to and not being given the opportunity to express herself, she feels empathy to her children, and therefore, is willing to give them the opportunity she never had as a child.

The following is an illustration of change based on the age of children, including the mother's age, as is the case with Naaila. She made the following statement in this regard:

> ". . . but as my children get older, I realize I have to deal [with them] differently; like my expectations or the way I expected to discipline them or treat them or relate to them is changed; it's become much more relaxed as they grow older and as I, myself grow older, personality has changed a lot. I used to worry a lot and be more tense around my children, protecting and worrying about how they would do, you know, but I find I'm becoming more relaxed, maybe because they have an understanding and because I'm satisfied about their behavior and the way they carry themselves."

Adua Konadu, too, has the same perspective as Naaila with regard to the age of children.

> "I think you change as your kids grow up, because when they are kids you do different things, for instance, you tell them what to do and they do it; you do things for them. But when they get older, then they can make decisions for themselves; you don't do much for them, like when they were small. Now they need more guidance. They can do things on their own."

Matshidiso supports the two women.

> ". . . my son has become more of a companion and a friend to me, . . . as opposed to the time when he was younger. When he was, I used to . . . talk to him instead of talking with him. Now, these days, I talk with him and . . . I listen. I no longer talk down on him. So this time I'm no longer right on top of his head trying to discipline him. I'm more at almost the same level where we're solving problems together."

Meanwhile, in the process of making changes to accommodate Canadian culture, the women often find themselves compelled to "really" contradict their will, values, customs and beliefs for the sake of conformity to Canadian culture. Asked as to whether she sometimes makes changes against her will, Adua Konadu responded:

> "Yes, that happens; like sleeping over at their friends'. I don't really like that . . . .you wonder, are they going to be safe there? It's like, what are you going to sleep

over for? . . . it's like if I had my way, I wouldn't have them sleep in any body's house, . . "

Some of the contradictions made by other women include allowing their children "to go to their friends' house and spend time", buying them presents all the time", letting the children "communicate with me at the same level", "socializing my children in English" and allowing them to make their own decisions and to behave contrary to the mothers' "cultural beliefs and values, yeah". Asked as to why they make such changes contrary to their values, they came up with various reasons among which are the following:

"It's the Canadian way of life . . ." (Duduza)

". . . it's just something within me, like intuitive, like I learned it and then now it's within me. I think it's just willingness to want to adjust to life in Canada. . . . I need some adapting; I need to adapt. . . . I just have to do it in order to get my children . . . to like me. If I'm going to try to be their boss, I know they won't like me anymore. . . . Yeah, [losing them emotionally], thinking that Mom is a bossy person and so on. So, I'm doing that and I don't want to be doing it." (Elda)

". . . as an immigrant parent you cannot expect to raise them the way you were raised back home because they would rebel too much." (Veronica)

It appears, however, that despite these contradictions, the determination to fit in and to maintain a healthy mother-child relationship surpasses the wish to hold on to their values. The reasons they provided point out to this will to conform.

The women expressed a variety of feelings, emotions and attitudes following the changes they make. Some may be positive, as maintained by Naaila:

> "Well, I feel contradiction is necessary up to a certain extent you know. I mean it's a struggle you know, . . ."

Sometimes the women express negative emotions:

> "It makes me feel a bit anxious sometimes. Some of it makes me upset, . . ." (Veronica)

> "Well the first time it was very hard. You don't sleep all night because you can't say whether you are doing the right thing . . ." (Adua Konadu)

> "You know, I feel helpless because there's nothing I can do about it." (Elda)

Feelings of guilt, regret and self blame may also be part of the transformation process as reflected by Elda's statement with regard to the language factor.

"You know, another thing I did against my will is, you know, socializing my children in English, you know. I talked to my children in English all the time and then they forgot their language, and then now I have to struggle again to teach them my language, you know, because they master English now, and then now I have to go back. I did that, I know I talked to them in English when we came here all the time. I just didn't know the repercussions would be that bad, and that you know, they would forget their language and so on. And I was doing that thinking that I... trying to make them improve, and you know, interact with other children and be able just to master the language and be good in it Yet at the same time I was doing... and of course making them forget my language; so, I didn't really want them to forget my language. As much as I wanted them to learn English, I didn't want them to forget my language."

Transformations are also accompanied by a sense of self loss. Matshidiso's explanation of this loss is as follows:

". . . you end up falling into the mainstream way of raising your child, and you lose your culture as you go, . . . you find that your identity, and your child's identity has to change; and that's not an easy thing- to assimilate, . . . that's what you lose. You have to give up certain things about yourself in order to accommodate the environment and be part of the environment in order to relax enough and enjoy the environment as being part of it. And that transition is never easy for anybody; . . . you find you go through stages of assimilation, through stages of really evaluating your identity in order to fit in. You lose yourself in the process. I'll tell you the other thing that is so bad is that when you go home to visit, the people who know you identify the changes, and they can point them out to you; and you find that you are unaccepted there and unaccepted here; and your child is going to go through that."

Matshidiso's statement also reflects someone still in transition where equilibrium has not been achieved yet. The challenge is to ride the rockiness of conflict and change to reach a balanced view of the two cultures.

Despite feelings of guilt and loss, the women seem to have embraced something from Canadian culture, which is, as Duduza puts it,

> ". . . I would say to listen from the child. I learned that. The way I was raised, man, there was no time my parents would listen to me. It was them, and that was it."

Elda concurs in the following way:

> ". . . I've started to learn to respect my children's point of view. I can see myself relating with my children at the same level, whereas when I was in Africa I wouldn't do that."

Regardless of the parenting struggles the women go through, for various reasons, they all are happy and satisfied with the role they play. They, on average, give their satisfaction level eight out of ten.

> "Well, I'm happy because [my children] are interested in their education, and I'm happy because they stay away

from trouble. . . .I can give them what I can afford." (Elda)

"I feel good. I don't have problems with my kids, and I feel that we've done a good job. We are very happy." (Adua Konadu)

As indicated by the preceding findings, it is evident that parenting in Canada for these women is not easy. It is an activity marked by a process of constant decision making in an environment they know little about. For these women, parenting means living in two conflicting worlds at the same time. It involves making choices on what, how, when and why to socialize their children. It also involves how to relate with their children who are being brought up in a world different from the one they (the women) have been brought up in. To accomplish this, they are constantly weighing the pros and cons from both their original culture and Canadian culture to select what they can incorporate in their parenting. This process involves constant conflicts with their values and beliefs as they attempt to create a parenting environment conducive to healthy relationships not only between them and their children, but also between their children and the outside environment, and themselves and others. It is a process which is marked by a continuous struggle to arrive at a cultural balance, which, unfortunately, is difficult to attain. A plus factor is that the women seem to benefit from the two cultures in that they have two systems of parenting "to draw from", in Naaila's words. Although the two

cultures, when practiced as separate, reflect an irreconcilable clash, ultimately, they seem to strengthen each other to produce one richer culture when practiced in combination,

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Feminist research is most useful to women when it provides suggestions for change intended to liberate women from their condition (Acker, et. al., in Fonow & Cook, p. 145). Feminist methodology requires that "Women must make personal and social choices about how they will address the political struggle necessary for their growth and development' (Baber & Allen, 1992:21). Still adhering to the feminist research perspective on the concept of subjectivity, I included the women's suggestions for change.

The women came up with several proposals to enhance the parenting environment for women of African descent. They all echo a need for programs specifically designed to support both the children and parents of this cultural group. Only one woman is satisfied with available programs for children and does not "see how they can improve it" and thinks that "whatever is there right now is good." Five of the women communicated their own suggestions for improvement in this regard:

> "we should have specific programs or workshops, anything important to meet, and to share chaos and concerns and things like that." (Naaila)

> "If we have the communities or a place where we can practice our own culture." (Elda)

". . . there are not too many ethnic groups that would help, that are focused on the needs of . . . especially of [people] of African descent; and I would think that it would be good if there was an established African organization that would help parents with their parenting skills; . . . in order for us to keep something about ourselves, that says who we are, . . . where we can tell our children and bring them to understand who they are, to know who they are, to feel good about who they are, and yet know that they can still live along side other people and function as citizens, you know, of Canada. . . . teach our children some aspects about themselves, which [are] specific to them; then they'll be able to say, yes, this is who I am, but I also know that as a Vancouverite this is what I believe in." (Matshidiso)

Veronica, as much as she supports the idea of having African centric resources, would also like to see more cultural programs introduced at schools. She also strongly feels that "it would be a big plus" if such programs could be introduced to the children as early as daycare level. She believes

". . . it would be a great thing if the kids could have these little cultural daycares, where you have maybe some Black organization or so forming their own daycare system for young kids, where the kids could begin to learn about their cultural background in that environment".

The women's suggestions in this respect reflect the foundation of their child-rearing practices, which is building children's self esteem. They are still reiterating the same need as outlined in the beginning of chapter four. This shows how important this issue is.

Real as it is that "there's not enough resources to provide for the above needs of the children", it appears that availability of such resources might not always serve the purpose outlined by the women. It might be the question of who is in control of such resources. Elda's experience with one African centric organization reflects this situation, which may be attributed to sexism.

> ". . . even if there's an African organization, they don't address children's issues, maybe because they don't have enough resources for the children. . . . they just said they don't deal with those issues. You know they are just thinking at the parent's level. They are looking at the economical problems of families but not children. . . . It could be because they are men who are leading the organizations, because men seem to overlook the issues of children. Maybe if there was an African women's group maybe that issue would have come up because men don't interact that much with children."

The women would also like to see the notion of community participatory parenting as practiced in their home countries adopted in Canada. Elda conveyed the following suggestion:

> "For instance, in Africa the whole village takes part in raising children. When children get in trouble outside in the street, and there is an elderly person passing by, she intervenes and sort of addresses the problem. But if you are in Canada . . . they just keep quiet and go by. So I think that if in Canada all the parents could participate in bringing up the children, it would be good because it's a good thing for children to learn from both society outside and from the family."

Duduza's opinion is similar to Elda's. In support she concurs:

> "So, I'll say if we all mothers we can come together and discipline our kids you know, and tell them that it doesn't matter who disciplines them, as long you know, there is an adult there, just respect that adult."

The same opinion about participatory parenting is also held by Naaila, however, with a different approach. Whereas Elda and Duduza would expect every parent, mother or adult to participate in the parenting role, Naaila stresses the principles of trust and acquaintance. She explains:

> "I think one way of substituting- that is having you know, like having mentors in the community or trying to foster more personal relationships with neighbors, things like that. . . . you know if neighbors were closer to each other, you know, and there were people in the community whom you could trust with your children you know; that they could be alternative parents or alternative adults that the children could love and feel comfortable with them, you know, if we could develop something like that."

Her approach incorporates the need for common approaches to avoid sending out conflicting messages to children. It also implies a safe environment for children, whereas Elda and Duduza, seem to equate parenthood and adulthood with responsibility. They tend to overlook the aspects of lack of shared community values and abuse as inflicted by adults on children.

Boulton notes that "Western industrial society is organized in such a way that it is necessary for the biological mother to look after her own children, or a least to take responsibility for ensuring that her children are looked after" (1983:16). Participatory parenting as recommended by the women would be beneficial.

In addition to participatory parenting, Duduza would also like to see grandparents getting more involved. She perceives them as a resourceful investment which is often not valued. Her argument in this regard is as follows:

> "What I found out here, you know, the grandparents are not part of society. They reach a certain age where they'll just take them to the nursing home . . . because if they were around I'd say we won't have that much problem with the children who are on the street, because they will help, you know; they'll educate. I believe that as they are old, they know a lot."

Duduza's strong feelings about grandparents seem to stem from her pre- Canadian experience. Earlier on she expressed the high esteem with which she holds grandparents; she equates them with psychologists. Research supports Duduza's observation. Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) and Kitzinger (1978), have also noted that in Western countries grandparents have been stripped of this traditional role and have been replaced by counselors.

The above discussion reflects two sides. On the one hand, the women would like to have African centric cultural resources for the

purpose of building the foundation of a solid self knowledge in their children. On the other hand, they would also like to see a cultural integration happen. This would be possible if all Canadian women, irrespective of cultural or racial background come together to discuss participatory parenting and other parenting issues as experienced by all women, by using existing resources. In this manner, they also advocate the notion of inclusion and equality. Naaila maintains:

> "Well, there's already in the Canadian environment and society here, they have a lot of institutions for parents to come together and discuss parenting, . . . So I think this is a great opportunity for parents to come together and exchange ideas and concerns and support each other, you know; And I think that this should be promoted even more you know, not just by professionals coming to educate parents about what they think should be the best way to raise their children but also give parents forum to exchange ideas and all that you know. I think that should be promoted."

Elda, too, holds the same perspective. She maintains:

> ". . . we have women's groups here in Victoria, and then if we can just address those issues . . . and talk about it among ourselves, . . . we can handle the situation; and then we won't have any problems with children misbehaving, or even you know, sometimes just educating the children."

The call for culture sensitive services reflects an observation by Torjman (1988). In her research on the gap between social services and women's needs, she states that

> "Traditional programs and services have not been particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant women . . . ethnic minority women who have lived in this country for many years find many services inappropriate or insensitive to their needs. Child-care programs, for example, tend to be 'unicultural' in their approach. There is insufficient attention paid to creating learning and play environments that are reflective of various cultural backgrounds." (Torjman, April, 1988:35)

Seward and McDade (1988:38-9) also made a similar observation about child care centers in Canada in their research on immigrant women in Canada.

Three women would also like to see the issue of racism taken seriously by the Canadian society at large. Elda presents her opinion in the following way:

> "If they address the issue of discrimination, . . . instead of just ignoring the whole thing . . . we are just the same people . . ."

Duduza adds:

> "You know, our children here we don't teach them you know, tell them that there are people who are different

> from them, who don't have the same color, . . . I'd like to see them, you know the children being together, loving each other, . . . look at each other that person is just like me; it's not that you know, I'm [more] special than them. If you know, we can just teach our children from the house because one of the things which I found out is it's like a pattern which keeps going on. The hatred is there outside; but it starts from home where . . . we teach them."

Naaila agrees with the other women on this issue. She would like to see all Canadians from different cultures make a joint effort "understanding and educating themselves more about other cultures such as mine so that they will have a better, less negative views about people from my culture." In her experience, she discovered that many children she interacts with are being fed negative information about other cultures, especially by the media, "and this causes them to have negative attitudes towards other children. . . . Yes, all my life, [racism] is a continuous experience."

Apart from holding individual parents and women's and parents' groups responsible to effect change, the women also see it as their personal responsibility as a group or as individuals to do so. Responding to the question how change can be effected with regard to racism, Elda suggested:

> ". . .the thing is, we the invisible people we have to voice out our confrontations, and we have to confront the issues."

Reflecting on her personal experiences with racism she continues:

"I know I'm very wrong to keep things to myself. If people are being discriminative and so on, I have to address the issues. . . . I know that if I want things to change I'll have to work towards changing the things myself. I have to be involved and try to participate in things, you know, so that things can change and so on. . . . But at the same time the problem is, I was thinking if I wanted to help my children not to go through what I'm going through is for me to speak up. So I think it's my responsibility to sort of fight this racial discrimination so that you know, my descendants don't go through what I went through."

Despite her feelings of inadequacy as far as racism, Elda has already tried participatory parenting as she advocated, and found it effective. She maintains that she once intervened when she saw "this kid spitting somewhere" and

". . . I talked to her . . . , but ever since I talked to this girl she never spit anymore at the transit zone . . ."

She suggested an effective approach to talk to the children:

"When we intervene, we don't have to be commanding or telling the children what to do. We just suggest that you know, . . . in an educative way. We don't have to be rude or mean when we talk to them; we just talk to them nicely and they understand, you know."

Intervention, may not always bring positive results as Duduza explains. She tried to advise young children against smoking, but

unlike Elda, got verbally insulted by the children, a reaction which might discourage other women.

Naaila, like the two women, is doing something as an individual to bring change regarding the issue of inclusion, through a home schooling group. She explains:

> "I like to initiate things you know, and I feel that in our little home schooling group, I've already shared a lot of information about how I discipline my children and how I was raised; and quite a few people appreciated the information, because I felt brave enough to . . . I feel it's my duty, if I have something I think it's more effective, then I should say [it]."

Based on the preceding discussion, it appears that to bring change, they would opt for the strategy of mainstreaming. They prefer to work within existing parenting social structures, together with women from other cultural backgrounds, by incorporating their own perspectives. However, to gain strength and support, they also would like to form their own cultural groups defined by their identity. Their focus seems to be on grassroots level- they see themselves as effective change agents at the local level.

IS THERE HOPE OUT THERE?

It appears that several social institutions are trying to respond positively to some of the parenting concerns of immigrant women. The ministry of education and ministry responsible for

multiculturalism and human rights have compiled an information book, Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services in British Columbia (1992). The booklet contains vital information to orient new immigrants. Although the booklet does not provide immigrant women with detailed information on the issues we have discussed, it does provide them with addresses and phone numbers of places which provide similar services.

There are also attempts by the Multicultural Society of Burnaby to offer "direct services" specifically directed at immigrants through a program called "Direct Services Project" This program, as stated was a move from "Indirect services" which have been offered in the past. The objective is to assist immigrants "in understanding the cultural differences they experience in their new home" (p. B-2). The same paper also announced the implementation of parenting programs directed at immigrant parents, and the inception of a support group for immigrant women and promotion of multicultural activities aimed to "end racism". These programs may seem attractive and helpful; however, there are limitations.

First is the problem of accessibility in terms of language as a barrier to many immigrants and in terms of finances as participants were required to pay for these services. We have already heard from my co-researchers that lack of money bars them from accessing the services they need. Second is the tendency of such programs to focus only on immigrants, isolating them from the larger group. This tendency inhibits integration and exchange of ideas between immigrants and the mainstream population. It also overshadows the experiences and voices of immigrants by separating them from

the rest of society. Such programs further send the damaging impression that problems of immigrants are not problems of Canada.

The Canadian social structure also seems to compensate for the extended family. The Social Services Department and volunteer and/or privately funded social groups and organizations provide services that are similar to those provided by extended families. The problem is that such services do not operate on the same level as extended families. Unlike the extended family which operates on a personal level, and which is flexible and loosely structured, these services are mostly structured, controlled professionalized and specialized. In addition, support from such social structures may be temporary and as such, may not create long lasting relationship like extended families. Moreover, they lack the intimacy that may be provided by extended families. A complementary alternative extended family model, which some of my co-researchers have practiced with their friends, is discussed by Dyck (1989; 1990).

Her research about the mothers who lived in the tri-city area of British Columbia's Lower Mainland- Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody discusses participatory parenting similar to the extended family In her studies, women make contacts with other mothers to discuss parenting issues (1990:469, 473) and to share information and to negotiate common parenting standards to avoid conflicting expectations of children as they look after one another's children (1989). Her (1989) study goes on to discuss situations where neighbors form even closer 'extended families' with a focus on the children. where "children commonly play in each other's backyards or on the street" (335). In my opinion, this model is a

good alternative to the extended family, provided the neighbors who come from diverse cultural backgrounds agree to make compromises, and come to a middle ground regarding their differences, especially in cultural values, and in ways of parenting.

There is also positive promise in the women's movement. The recent appointment of a woman of African descent as president of NAC (National Action Committee) is a major breakthrough. Also, as I am writing, there is a big meeting happening in Ottawa between representatives from several women's groups and the Minister of Justice to discuss women's issues, including immigrant women's issues. This may be a positive move towards 'inclusion'.

Concluding on my findings up to so far, I would like to stress that this thesis successfully documented and presented the women's experiences and perspectives of parenting in a different culture. The feminist oral history methodology employed has been crucial in illuminating these experiences and how they are being perceived, interpreted and analyzed by the participants. Evident in the findings is the problem of accessing information related to parenting, especially on the women's arrival in Canada. It is also evident that the women's different cultural background and values which basically conflict with Canadian parenting makes the process of parenting and adaptation complex and challenging issues. Lack of appropriate services, facilities and resources designed to address specific needs of these mothers further complicates their situation. The findings further point out to unique experiences such as racism and fear of state intervention. Racism is an important issue which needs immediate attention, especially by schools. The fact that all

women reported incidences racism experienced by their children especially at school, including daycare, questions the effectiveness of the school in addressing racism. Similarly, the fear of state intervention, and possibility of child apprehension seems to uniquely haunt these women. Other women (Dyck, 1989), do not seem to have such a fear; however, like my co-researchers, have fears in relation to the safety of their children.

The findings also indicate that the way in which these women mother is influenced by both their original culture and the Canadian culture. This finding recognizes the fact that "the specific ways in which children are cared for and socialized are not in any sense 'natural' or static, . . . " (Dyck, 1989:465).

The findings also echo the same voice as contemporary feminist theorists and researchers, that of equality, difference and inclusion. It is evident that specific parenting problems and needs of immigrant women of African descent have not been adequately addressed the government and social services. It is, therefore, important that we advocate for inclusion of this group of women at all the levels of social programs which involve children, planning and administration positions. Similarly, it is important that immigrant women demand participation in existing programs. Given this situation, more research should address the questions: What are the limiting factors to such inclusion? How do government agencies and institutions deal with parenting problems of immigrant parents? To what extent are existing social institutions, especially the school, and programs sensitive to the specific needs of children

of African descent, including children from other visible minority groups?

Furthermore, future research in the area of parenting of women of African descent should look into issues how economic factors such as income, poverty, class, employment, and factors such as health impact on the parenting of these women. It is also important to look more closely at the role played by fathers. Also, we need to include perspectives of children. To achieve success in this area we need to document and publish more detailed personal stories from and about parenting issues of people of African descent. Such research would necessitate oral history methodology

This research has successfully demonstrated that in-depth interviewing is an effective tool of research. However, like any other methodology, it is not immune to limitations. Preference for a small sample may be problematic. In the case of my research, the sample of six women may not be sufficient enough to adequately draw generalized conclusions about experiences and perspectives of all women of African descent. I would, therefore, stress that the information in this thesis about parenting is reflective of my co-researchers' perceptions of parenting based on, and limited by their experiences. The information should, therefore, not be interpreted as representative of everybody else's reality, or Canadian reality as it may be known to other people.

APPENDIX A

My name is Addy, a mother of two boys, ages eighteen years and twenty two months. I am a student at Simon Fraser University doing a research on the parenting experiences of immigrant women of African cultural background. I am particularly interested in your experiences as regards psychological upbringing of your child or children since you came to Canada. Your story should reveal how you do this, how you cope, including both the pleasant and unpleasant sides of your experiences. After you have finished telling your story, I would like you to provide me with more specific information according to the questions I will ask. Thereafter, if you have anything to add, or questions to ask, you are welcome to do so. I would like us to relate as equals, as women who share the same experience and who seek better solutions to whatever problems we have. Note that I am taping this discussion, and if you want to use a different name, you are still welcome to do so. Please feel free and comfortable to speak up your mind. If you have any questions before we begin, you may ask them now.

LIST OF QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. How would you identify yourself in terms of name or pseudonym, ethnicity, cultural background?

2. How long have you been in Canada?

3. Which country are you from?

4. How many children do you have?

5. Where were they born?

6. How old are they?

7. Briefly describe how children are 'educated' in your country; i.e., what is it that they are taught, the upheld values and beliefs, who is responsible for the 'education' of the children, how do they go about it, (including disciplinary measures), the age at which your culture considers a child to be responsible, etc...?

8. How were you raised in particular?

9. What are your own beliefs and values concerning child rearing?

10. What did you know about Canadian ways of raising children before you came to Canada?

11. What were your expectations in this area before you came here?

12. If you already had children when you came here, did you fantasize or worry about their upbringing?

13. What is it that you were fantasizing or worried about?

FACING REALITY

The following questions are bout your initial experiences in Canada.

14. What reality were you confronted with when you arrived?

15. What information did you get after your arrival about children in Canada?

16. Do you know about parenting resources and programs available in Vancouver?

17. If yes, how long ago have you known about them?

18. How did you know about them?

19. Have you ever used them?

20. If not, why not?

21. If yes, how did you find them?

21. Do you still use them?

22. If not, why not?

23. Other than formal resources on parenting, how else do and/or did you obtain information about child rearing in Canada?

24. Do you think the knowledge that you have about raising children is sufficient to enable you to raise your child/children in Canada? Please explain.

25. Are you familiar with the lifestyles and/or behavior of Canadian children?

26. If yes, how did you learn about it?

27. Do you think that knowledge of this is inevitable in your parenting role?

EXPERIENCES WITH CHILDREN

The following questions concern your relationship with your children.

28. How would you describe your relationship with your children?

29. What is it that you 'educate' your children about?

30. What do you hope to accomplish at the end of this interaction with your children? Please elaborate on your aims and expectations about your children?

31. How do you go about this 'education'? Please discuss the methods you use with each of your children (if different), why and when you use or stop using these methods.

32. What do your children think about what you teach them and how you go about it?

33. How do you feel about their remarks on your parenting role?

34. How would you describe behavior of your children?

35. What factors or people do you think are the principal influencers of your child/children's the behavior?

36. What are your greatest fears as a mother in relation to your child/children?

37. What triggers these fears?

38. What is it about your children that makes you angry, sad or disappointed?

39. What is it that makes you happy or satisfied?

40. Is there anything else that you wish for in your parenting role?

EXPERIENCES WITH THE CANADIAN SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

41. Which social institutions or people have you interacted with as the result of your parenting role?

42. For what reasons?

43. Are you and, or your child still interacting with these institutions or people?

44. If not, why did you stop?

45. If yes, what major positive and/or negative part do they play in the upbringing of your child?

46. Do you ever discuss parenting issues with people in these institutions?

47. If yes, what is their perception of your parenting as compared to their own view of parenting?

48. How do you feel about their point of view?

49. How does interaction with these institutions or people affect the relationship between you and your child/children?

EXPERIENCES WITH AND WITHIN YOURSELF.

50. How do you define or perceive yourself in connection with the role you play in the life of your child concerning parenting?

51. How do you feel about the role that you play in the life of your child?

52. To what extent is your parenting tied to both your past experiences before you came to Canada, (that is, to your culture, your beliefs, your values, etc., and to the way in which you have been raised) and your experiences in Canada?

53. What major personal and parenting changes (if any have taken place) in your perception of parenting, and of yourself as a parent?

54. What triggered such changes?

55. To what extent are you satisfied and/or not satisfied with your parenting situation at this moment?

56. Could you give reasons for the above feelings?

57. What do you wish for yourself in the parenting process so that you could be satisfied with yourself?

58. Do you do anything in your parenting which is against your will, your personal and, or cultural beliefs and values?

59. If so what is it and why are you doing it?

60. How do you feel about the fact that you sometimes contradict your own convictions?

61. Which coping strategies do you employ in this regard?

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The purpose of the following questions is to identify the sources of our parenting problems and to come up with better ways which will make our parenting and the parenting of those women who are still to immigrate to Canada more comfortable.

62. Make a brief comment or evaluation of the Canadian social environment as a parenting place.

63. What type of place do you think Vancouver is in facilitating and/or inhibiting what you consider to be a comfortable parenting atmosphere and environment for you in particular?

64. What parenting factors do you miss from your culture, and would you ike to see accommodated in the Canadian social environment? What contribution and/or difference, in your opinion, would these factors make in your parenting role and the life of your children?

65. Which positive factors within the Canadian culture would you like to see promoted in order to make your parenting easier? Why?

66. What is it that you really like and/or hate about parenting in Vancouver/ Why?

67. What changes (if any), would you like to see in the Canadian social environment in order to accommodate your needs as a 'child socialiser' and the needs of your children? That is , what is your ideal child raising environment?

APPENDIX B

Form
#2

Simon Fraser University

INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT OR EXPERIMENT

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures involved. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received the document described below regarding this project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

Having been asked by ----------of the ----------Faculty/School/Department of Simon Fraser University to participate in a research project experiment, I have read the procedures specified in the document entitled:

I understand the procedures to be used in this study, which are completion of one interview approximating to two and half hours and one or two more optional follow up interviews with regard to my parenting experiences.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation in this study at any time.

I further understand that the researcher will, during the research and afterwards, keep all responses confidential and protect my identity by using the pseudonym I shall have provided.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the experiment with the chief researcher named above or with

----------, Dean/Director/Chair of

----------Simon Fraser University.

Copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, may be obtained by

contacting ----------.

I agree to participate by ----------

(state what the subject will do)
as described in the document referred to above, during the period: ----------

---------- at ----------

(place where procedures will be carried out)

NAME (Please print): ----------

ADDRESS: ----------

SIGNATURE: ---------- WITNESS: ----------

DATE: ---------- DATE: ----------

Once signed, a copy of this consent form and a subject feedback form should be provided to you.

Form # 4

SFU RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

SUBJECT FEEDBACK FORM

Completion of this form is optional, and is not a requirement of participation in the project. However, if you have served as a subject in a project and would care to comment on procedures involved, you may complete the following form and send it to the Chairman, University Research Ethics Review Committee. All information received will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

Name of Principal Investigator: ----------

Title of Project: ----------

Department: ----------

Did you sign an Informed Consent Form before participating in the project?

Were you given a copy of the Consent Form? ----------

Were there significant deviations from the originally stated procedure? ------

---

(Date) (Place)
(Time)

Comments: ----------

Completion of this section is optional

Your name: ----------

Address: ----------

Telephone:----------

This form should be sent to the Chairman, University Ethics Review Committee, c/o Vice President, Research and Information Systems, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6.

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