

The learning experiences of members of an Africentric Support Group at a small urban-based Nova Scotian university

By:

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my two sons – Randy (RJ) and Jaaziah-

I desire that you build on your father's legacy.

I did not set a boundary, but a path for you to go further.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks be to God for His wisdom and His strength. *"I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart..."* Psalms 9:1a

To my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Brigham, who challenged me to do better and guided me through this journey, I say thank you. You were instrumental in mentoring me, and I desire that all Black students find a professor like you to guide them as you did for me.

To my committee member, Kesa Munroe Anderson, I thank you for your guidance and feedback to bring my ideas to fruition.

To my family, I say thanks for your unwavering love and support throughout this journey. The journey would have been arduous without your support. To my virtuous wife, Josyl, "your children shall rise up and call you blessed, your husband also, and he shall praise you." To my two boys, Randy (RJ) and Jaaziah, I can finally answer your question, "When will you graduate daddy? And your encouragement, "Maybe I will graduate before you, Daddy!" I know you meant well.

It would have been impossible to do this research without the support of the Africentric Support Group members, and the 10 participants who willingly shared their personal experiences. You have indeed supported my vision for changes to the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU. Using the words "members and participants" really underscore the relationship we have developed over the past few years, and so I call you "family."

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And finally, to my dear grandmother, Doreen James, for the times we debated [argued] about the issues facing Black people around the world and for little reminders to get this thesis done before you go blind, I thank you. You are the best grandmother a child can ask for, and I'm glad I am one of the lucky ones to be able to call you, Granny.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIQM	Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology
ANS	African Nova Scotian
ASG	Africentric Support Group
BLAC	Black Learners Advisory Committee
CACE	Council on African Canadian Education
CASAE	Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education Association
CRT	Critical Race Theory
GSSL	Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning
HRSB	Halifax Regional School Board
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
MSVU	Mount Saint Vincent University
NCU	Northern Caribbean University
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBI	Predominant Black Institution
PWI	Predominantly White Institution
TCPS	Canadian Tri-council Policy Statement
AF1	African student with the number 1 who participated in the focus group interview.
CA1	Canadian student with the number 1 who participated in the focus group interview
CB1	Caribbean student with the number 1 who participated in the focus group interview

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By

Randy Headley

ABSTRACT

The learning experiences of Black students at post-secondary institutions in Canada is not a commonly researched topic. However, it is an area of study that generates many questions, with little to no answers.

My investigation about the learning experiences of ten (10) Black students at a small urban-based Nova Scotia university, who are part of an Africentric support group (ASG), will provide some of the answers by foregrounding the experiences and voices from the data collected during a focus group and one-to-one interviews.

This study centers the voices of four participants from Africa, three from Canada and three from the Caribbean and Bermuda. Using an Africentric Informed Qualitative Research Methodology, I engage participants to take ownership of the research and to become equal with the researcher. By using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the emerging themes suggest that the ASG plays a significant role in the learning experiences of participants, although they struggle with issues such as alienation from the curriculum and classroom, racial discrimination, stereotype and cultural identity issues.

By exploring the influence of the ASG on the learning experiences of these participants, I was able to show that an Africentric perspective is required to make any significant changes to the learning experiences of Black students at a small urban-based Nova Scotia university.

“If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him” ~Ghandi

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

In considering a thesis research topic, I had to consider what matters to me. To answer this question, I reflected on my previous learning experiences in the academy to inform my decision. These experiences, which I discussed in the personal statement section, have led me to focus on the learning experience of my fellow Black students at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). The differences in my learning experience at the undergraduate and graduate level were significant enough to arouse my interest in this study and to document the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU. There are no studies, at this time, that tell us what the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU are, hence, an investigation was required.

This thesis investigates the learning experiences of members of the Africentric Support Group at MSVU. Using an Africentric perspective, I identified some of those factors that affect the academic success of participants and investigate the students’ conceptualization of their racial identity.

Based on my past experiences at MSVU as a Black International undergraduate student, the past Africentric Support Group (ASG) Coordinator (2013-2017) and as a current graduate student in the Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning program (GSL), as well as my review of the literature on Black students’ learning experiences at university (Paul, 2012; Codjoe, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2006; Brigham, 2007, Parris and Brigham 2010) and research on racial identity (Tatum, 1997), I investigated the experiences of ten (10) Black students at MSVU. Participants were selected based on their countries of origin, gender and degree of enrolment, (see

‘Participant’ section for the full list of criteria used to select participants for this study). The data collected from this study was first used to analyze the differences and commonalities in the learning experiences of Black students, and secondly, to enlarge the discourse surrounding access to an equitable education at MSVU.

Historically, people of African descent in Nova Scotia have endured what Firemong (2014) refers to as “educational inequity,” which dates back to the late 1700s. These inequities were again identified in the BLAC Report (1994) and continue to capture the attention of the local media, the African Nova Scotian communities, educators, and other stakeholders.

MSVU is an ideal context for several reasons: its size, social engagement, and location. MSVU historically and traditionally has “been concerned about the welfare and fortune of individuals and communities, at home and abroad...”¹, and its commitment to advancing learning opportunities for women and other minority groups has made it attractive to a diverse student population. As noted by Ayoka Junaid (personal communication, 1st February 2016), the University overlooks the old Africville site and Africville Museum, which provides strength to her while studying at MSVU. Junaid’s comments have led me to believe that Black students are not merely looking for the standard education, but they are also looking for opportunities to connect with their communities and African heritage.

Betts et al. (2005, p.3), who see education as an essential instrument rather than the answer to the problem of inequity, state, “Education is perhaps the *main tool* that democracies use to attempt to equalize economic opportunities among citizens.” Betts’ claim challenges us to question whether education is a privilege reserved for a particular sector of society.

¹ <http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/universityprofile/traditionandhistory.aspx>

Relying on the research of Codjoe (2005), Dei (1994) and James (2010, 2011), who have similar interests as I, this thesis sought to understand and document the learning experiences of participants who are of Black/African descent at MSVU.

Based on the literature reviewed, there was a certain level of expectation that there will be some similarities in the learning experience of Black students at MSVU. However, the uniqueness of each student's experience, as described in the "Background section" provided an insight into the complicated relationship between Black students and their learning environment at Mount Saint Vincent University, a relatively small post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia.

As Ritchey (2014) rightly points out: "It is important to keep in mind that every student is at different stages in their developmental process... support might, therefore, look different for every student" (p.99). Magolda (2001) expressed that "higher education has a responsibility to help young adults make the transition from their socialization by society to their role as members and leaders in society's future" (p.25). Mae (1999) and Swail (2003) support the notion that universities/colleges have an obligation to ensure that they support students. Support provided by the institution and the community can contribute to a positive learning experience, according to Swail. Community, according to Collins-Warfield (2008), does not exclusively refer to a geographic neighbourhood; it can also be based on human relationships (p.8). Coetzee, (1998, cited in Collins-Warfield 2008, p.8) defined community from the perspective of the Ubuntu philosophy to mean "an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life."

Codjoe (2001) identified several factors, which he claims, contributed to a negative learning experience among the participants in his study, which documented and analyzed the experiences of academically successful Black students in Alberta's secondary schools. Among these negative

learning experiences are the following: racism, alienation, microaggressions, stereotypes, and identity threat. These are also responsible for significantly impacting students' identity and social development. This thesis investigated how Black Student identity was affected by these factors and how the factors affected their learning experiences.

How can institutions begin the process of engagement without knowledge of student demographic?

It has only been since 2012 that applicants have been given the opportunity to self-identify their racial background on their application to study at MSVU. Thus it is not clear when the first Black students enrolled at MSVU. However, it may have been in the late 1960s (personal communication with Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard). Since then, MSVU has seen a steady increase in the number of Black students on its campus, from local, national and international destinations. This lack of formal data collection about Black students at MSVU over the years did nothing to motivate the university to adjust to the needs of its increasing Black student population. Before the formation of the ASG, Black students relied solely on informal support through societies and student groups.

Unfortunately, a post-secondary institution's disregard for the needs of minority students is not a new phenomenon to grab the attention for a public outcry. In fact (I will draw your attention to the research conducted by Kanu which supports my belief), it appears to be a common occurrence. Kanu (2008) found that "increases in the number of students with refugee experiences in Western countries is often not accompanied by appropriate educational and other specialized support specifically targeted to assist the acculturation, integration and school success of students who are from war-affected, disrupted schooling backgrounds" (p.916).

Kanu’s research expresses insight on the issue of what I call “**university un/preparedness²**” for minority students, especially those immigrating to Canada.

Drawing on the experience of previous Black MSVU students, like Melina Kennedy and Isha Simmons-Davis, (*see personal experience section*), I was able to shed light on the difficulty some Black students experienced in attempting to become socially integrated. Factors such as language (accent), culture, race, microaggressions, ignorance and negative stereotypes were discussed in their personal statements.

This research was conducted using an African-centered qualitative approach, *which I discuss in the methodology section*, to investigate the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU who come from three of the most common regions of the world with African heritage: Canada [more specifically, Nova Scotia], the Caribbean/Bermuda and Africa.

For my theoretical framework, I drew on critical race theory (CRT) and Africentricity. CRT, as proposed by Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995), contends that “racism is not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (p.52).

Africentricity, from the perspective of scholars such as Dei (1994, p.3) who “examined alternative ways that Afrocentric knowledge can be constructed and legitimized within various epistemological constructs,” to re-assert a sense of agency for Black students [and all people of African ancestry].

I analyzed the data collected from students of Black/African descent at MSVU, using a qualitative research methodology, which I explain in the methodology section. The information received was used to inform us of the learning experiences of each participant.

² University un/preparedness refers to the lack of pertinent resources to foster optimal learning outcomes.

The Reason for this Study

According to the MSVU website (2017), “The history of the Mount is a story of humanity and growth. From its inception, Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU/the Mount) has been concerned about the welfare and future of individuals and communities, at home and abroad.”

The Mount is also unique regarding its size (number of enrolled students) and class sizes, compared to the other universities in closest proximity.

It is this uniqueness along with the small number of Black students in relation to the total student population, less than 5% that make MSVU the ideal location for this research. This research will also add to the limited literature that informs us about Black student experiences and helps to answer some of the questions we all strive to ascertain about Black student experiences at MSVU.

Historical Background: Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU)

“Established by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1873”³, MSVU was initially set up to “train novices and young Sisters as teachers, but the Sisters also recognized a need to educate other young women and therefore opened the academy to young women who lived in the city of Halifax.”

MSVU is primarily an undergraduate public university located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The University offers small class sizes and specialty programs. MSVU has Canada Research Chairs who foster “the continued development of research in areas which enable the university to build on its significant research strengths and contributions in fields such as”⁴

- Gender
- Food Security and Policy Change
- Social Innovation and Community Engagement

³ <http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/universityprofile/traditionandhistory.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/srp-prs/msvu-eng.pdf>

Former MSVU Canada Research Chairs specialize in the areas of

- Aging and Caregiving Policy
- Equity and Technology

The significance of these Research Chairs is closely tied to the University's established mandate: “to act on the issues concerning the welfare and fortune of individuals and communities, at home and abroad.”⁵

MSVU’s leadership role in addressing the needs of diverse communities and its leadership role in “Flexible Education, professional studies, traditional Arts and Sciences and applied research,” have historically set it apart from most higher learning institutions in Canada.

In 2013, MSVU began tracking Black student’s retention and enrollment. An enrollment report presented by the Institutional Analyst (p.1)⁶, showed that most Black undergraduate students enrolled in either the Bachelor of Business Administration or Bachelor of Arts program and most Black graduate level students enrolled in the Literacy Education and Curriculum Studies programs in the Faculty of Education.

By 2015, enrollment statistics showed that 206⁷ of approximately 4000 students enrolled at MSVU were Black/African descent, and they were predominantly African Nova Scotian. *No records were found about the faculty demographics.*

The intentional effort of the University to engage the African Nova Scotian community in the academy was also significant in selecting it for my research. For example, as noted on the MSVU website⁸, “in partnership with the Council on African Canadian Education and the Africentric Learning Institute, the Mount has offered graduate programs in Studies in Lifelong Learning with a focus on Africentric Leadership to three cohorts of 20 African Nova Scotian

⁵ <http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/universityprofile/traditionandhistory.aspx>

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/Stats%20at%20a%20glance%20-%202011.pdf>

⁷ Information provided by the institutional analyst’s office on June 29th 2016

⁸ <http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/programsdepartments/education/graduateprograms/gsll/cohorts/default.aspx>

students.”. This means that between 2006 and 2013 approximately 55 ANS students have graduated from these cohorts (S. Brigham, personal communication, May, 2017).

Furthermore, the website states, “the curriculum for this cohort explores Africentric approaches to policy and research related to a range of lifelong learning contexts and initiatives. It is designed to build capacity in the African Nova Scotian community to contribute to policy development and research.”

A Brief History of the Canadian education system

Savas (2013) reminds us that the genesis of higher education in Canada, like the USA, dates back to the colonial era. Cohen et al. (2006) and Thelin (2004), (cited in Savas, p.512) agreed that historically, “American higher education institutions were predominantly influenced by English culture and the Christian tradition.” Similarly, Jones (2014, p.2) mentioned that “under the French colonial period, the Roman Catholic Church assumed responsibility for education at all levels.” Jones went on to state that in Canada “...while the British destroyed many of the institutions that had emerged during the French colonial period, they tolerated the Church and its central role in the provision of education to French-speaking populations” (p.2). Jones also reminds us that early education initiatives in Canada focused on “civilizing” Aboriginal peoples through residential schooling and religious conversion.

Although Harris, (1976, cited in Jones p.2) was able to trace the “history of higher education in Canada back to the advanced courses offered by a Jesuit college in 1663,” Jones believes that it was the American Revolution that influenced the initial development of higher education in Canada during the British colonial period.

Referring to the colonial era, Brubacher and Rudy (1997, cited in Savas, p.512) points out, “European settlers who wanted to establish a new culture mainly influenced the organizational

structures of these colonial institutions [Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Rutgers, William and Mary, and University of Pennsylvania], that were mainly based on Cambridge and Oxford type as observed in England.” This was confirmed by Muir, (1994, cited in Jones, 2014, p.3), who found that the educational system directly influenced organizational structures. Savas (2013) agreed that formal education in Canada was “reserved for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males” (p.512). For example, the first King’s College was founded in Windsor (Nova Scotia) in 1789, and the College of New Brunswick was created in Fredericton in 1800. McGill College emerged in Montreal in 1821 supported by funds from the estate of James McGill.

The Black/African Canadian education experience

According to Firemong (2014), the history of Black Canadian students at MSVU is suffused in a long history of inequitable education and living conditions, especially in the Nova Scotian context, dating back to the 1700s. Firemong (2014, p.12), provided a detailed historical background of the largest groups of Black settlers to Nova Scotia in three broad phases:

The first phase, “from 1782 –1785, included some 3000 ex-slaves who, having fought on the side of Britain during the American Revolution, arrived with British promises of liberty, land, and equality.”

The second wave of some 500 Maroon exiles from Jamaica arrived in Nova Scotia in 1796 through a compromise deal with the British authorities who were bearing the brunt of Maroon anti-slavery rebellions in Jamaica.

The third wave of Blacks appeared after the war of 1812 when some 2000 escaped slaves fought on the side of the British.

Walker, (1985, cited in Firemong 2014, p.12), found that once in Nova Scotia, Blacks were settled in tiny, isolated communities on the outskirts of the cities and larger towns. According to

Nelson, (2008, p. 41, cited in Firempong 2014, p.12) racial spatial management allowed for them to be easily monitored, controlled and kept impoverished.

Black/African education experience in Nova Scotia

Sehatzadeh (2008) reminds us that “although education is regarded as the road out of poverty, for these early settlers it served to reinforce their marginalization from the wider White society and thus maintained the status quo” (p.409). Sehatzadeh (2008) also found that most of the Elders [senior citizens] left school by Grade 7 or 8 to help support their families, (p.409).

Sehatzadeh (1998, cited in Sehatzadeh 2008) concluded that although “African Nova Scotian children in Dartmouth were integrated into the common schools after the closure of the segregated school in 1916” (p.408), they only had “access to the best educational system in the province during the 1950s and 1960s but were still subjected to systemic racial streaming into programs for trades and not academic ones leading to university” (p.410). Many of the characteristics of this African Nova Scotian community, according to Sehatzadeh (2008) were “mirrored in many other small Black communities across Canada and throughout North America” (pp. 410-411).

Brigham (2007, p.4), explained:

The racial tensions between Black and White students at Cole Harbour High in Dartmouth in 1989, led to a number of significant outcomes. One outcome was the establishment of the Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) which over a period of 5 years researched the history and status of Black learners in NS. In 1994, BLAC released its Report on Education with forty-six (46) recommendations. One of the recommendations was that the ‘BLAC committee’ become a Council on African Canadian Education (CACE) which was granted in 1996.

The BLAC Report on Education (1994) addressed the state of the educational system in Nova Scotia at that time and made recommendations that would have a lasting impact on the school system and the lives of African Nova Scotian students. The report highlighted a “vision for an education system which is equitable, accessible and inclusive for all learners by the year 2001” (p. 15).

The BLAC report showed that “the history of Black education in Nova Scotia is largely one of exclusion and neglect, legalized through discriminatory legislation and enforced by the racial attitudes of White society. For more than two hundred years, the Black population of this province has been systematically denied an education on an equal footing with the White population” (p. 9).

This systemic denial of an equal education was found to have stretched across the diaspora. James (2010, cited in Aladejebi, 2015 p.7) concluded that it was not an uncommon practice for members of the Canadian society to classify all people of African descent as having the same lived experience. In fact, Aladejebi, (2015) mentioned that “there is a commonality of a ‘Black experience’ propelled by anti-Black racism” (p.7). Aladejebi (2015) further supports what James (2010) decried as:

the practice of generalization in studies involving African Canadians, although it was quite evident that the African Canadian communities represent a vast number of ethnic and cultural groups, [which] speaks numerous dialects and languages and practices a variety of religions. (p.36)

This generalization, according to Thiessen, (2009, p.1, cited in Firemong, 2014, p.15), provided evidence, which Firemong suggests, continued to perpetuate negative attention towards Black students. Thiessen, (2009, p.1, cited in Firemong, 2014, p.15), found that regarding the

educational achievement in elementary and junior high schools, Blacks lag far behind Whites, Acadians, and First Nations in the province.

Even as recent as March 2016, we are still finding evidence that our education system is failing Black students, as is reported in a local newspaper, which states that “The Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) chair says the school system is ‘drastically failing’ students of African descent.”⁹

According to the BLAC Report (1994, p.19), ever since integration in 1954, the Black community has been attempting to “*catch up*” in education. The report went on to say that “change has been at a snail’s pace mainly because there has been little effort on the part of the education system to address the central problem of institutional racism.”

What will be the learning experience of Black students in the future, if we do nothing today? Understanding that *if we do nothing, we will continue to get the same results*, is paramount to the need for change and the way this investigation into the learning experience of Black/African students at MSVU is conducted.

Based on my previous experience and review of relevant literature, I believe we need to understand the personal experiences of this very diverse group of participants, from their perspective.

Personal Reflection

I came to study as an international student at MSVU in 2003, after completing undergraduate studies at the University of Guyana in 2002 and graduated with a four-year undergraduate degree in 2007. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Education at MSVU. I believe my personal insights contribute to this study. A personal contribution to the study, according to

⁹ Halifax Metro News article: <http://www.metronews.ca/news/halifax/2016/03/31/data-shows-system-failing-halifax-students-african-descent.html>

Reviere (2001) is what Afrocentrism is all about. Afrocentrism allows the researcher to describe his or her reality from their perspective (p.711). Mkabela (2005) also stated that the researcher must become an active participant in his/her research when conducting studies in indigenous African communities (pp.180, 183-4).

As a staff member, past ASG Coordinator, a position I held for four years at MSVU, a graduate student, and researcher, I straddle the thin line of becoming emotionally engulfed and wanting to distance myself from the research while conducting this study. However, my years of experience at MSVU have already proven to be an invaluable asset to the success of this study.

As an international student originally from Guyana, I have come to appreciate the availability of resources in Canada that were favourable in creating a better learning experience. However, not having direct access to the resources that would enhance my learning, such as literature about the contribution of people other than those of European descent in Business, for example, created a skewed understanding of the world.

It was at MSVU that I had my first experience of what it meant to be Black in Nova Scotia. Now that I had traversed the valley of stereotypical assumptions I can reflect on some of the different ways Black students are perceived and treated when they try to have their needs met and sometimes when they try to integrate socially.

The subtlety of systemic racism still lingers, whether it was consciously perpetuated or not. For example, comments such as, “Where are you from? Are you planning on going back to Guyana after you are done studying? What brought you to this cold place when there are so many other places that are much warmer? You must miss your home and dying to go back?” and, “What part of Africa are you from?” On the surface, these questions appear to be friendly, but they actually suggest my lack of truly belonging in this place.

Micro-aggressive statements such as, “As someone from the LGBT community, I know what you experience as a Black person”; “Everyone can succeed in this society if he or she put in the hard work,” and “You are not like the other Black students” or “your English sounds almost like a Canadian student,” coupled with the constant stereotypical remarks contributed significantly to the framing of my learning experience.

Like many Black international students, I did not understand the concept of racism or have enough experience with it to be able to determine how to react to it. Most of these “racial” encounters were subtle enough that I had difficulty in determining whether or not the speaker was ignorant or racist.

Being the representative of Black people: Being the only Black student in most classes seemed to be the norm and an automatic requirement to be the spokesperson for all things Black/Africa, whether or not I knew the answer or was qualified enough to respond to the question. In hindsight, I now recognized the damage that misinformation can cause, by taking into account that most Black/African students were not taught enough about their culture in a densely colonial/European influenced school system. Being asked to speak about all things Black/African is not only unfair to the only Black student in the room but leads to further ignorance.

It was evident to me that most professors went the extra step to engage all students. However, in my experience, many professors were unprepared to engage in classrooms with a culturally diverse group of students. For example, an open invitation to meet with a professor to further explain the course material or for academic advising is received differently by “minority” students. Further research is required to find the reasoning behind why many minority students choose to ‘fly under the radar’ rather than actively engage with professors, thus lowering our confidence to take part in the classroom.

There was no professor of African descent in the Business Faculty, during my enrollment at the undergraduate level. This experience resulted in me having some difficulties relating to White faculty members, on the notion of life experiences and struggles, and apprehension to confidently engage in the classroom.

The lack of a formal support system for myself and other Black students in early 2000, was the main reason for the development of informal support groups, such as the Caribbean, African, and International Students Society. The alternative at that time was connecting with the Black Student Association at Dalhousie University for culturally appropriate support.

The colour of my skin or race never mattered until I moved to Canada. The new knowledge of “being Black” meant that I had to constantly negotiate, and at times suppress my national identity, to be able to participate in my new environment. Self-monitoring and being aware of my surroundings were, and sometimes still is, of paramount importance, to avoid embarrassing the “Black race.”

Understanding the Black Student Experience at MSVU

Randy’s Experience

On many occasions, I was discouraged from pursuing graduate studies by past work colleagues and faculty members, and from conducting research. Issues such as my overcommitted schedule to other activities and my lack of research background were given, and although these were legitimate reasons, at the time, I was looking for a career change. I chose to listen to those that provided support, which I found through some work colleagues and faculty members, who listened to my vision and were able to provide invaluable advice and support to pursue my research.

Graduate school created immeasurable opportunities to view the educational sphere through different lenses. It allowed for collaborative and constructive work that would, as Mezirow

(1997) would put it, transform my perspectives. Graduate school provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my undergraduate experience and a learning experience that could only have been achieved by me actively participating in the learning process. Through this process, I was able to create the Africentric Support Group, as the practicum requirement (GEDU 6290), for the Lifelong Learning Degree program. My practicum, *Empowering Students of African Descent at MSVU*, involved looking for opportunities to promote the contribution Black students make to the MSVU community.

Forty-seven (47) students joined the ASG at the startup; the group later grew to over seventy active members. Most students expressed the need for changes to the way Black/African descent students experience their education at the Mount, hence, the strong membership support.

It would be an understatement to say that a sense of community was developed since the formation of the ASG; in fact, the shift in Black students' engagement was so evident that the Office of Student Experience reported internally, an increase in both the enrollment and retention numbers in 2015 of Black students which were a direct result of the ASG. Learning together and embracing the Africentric model, with a communal focus, has provided Black/African students with a shared intention, to empower each other.

As a Black Graduate student who engaged in research on the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU, as a Program Developer and Coordinator at MSVU, I bring a unique perspective to facilitate our understanding of how the Academy can better serve the needs of Black/African students at MSVU.

Isha Simmons-Davis's Experience

Isha was an international student from the Caribbean and a graduate of the Bachelor of Business Administration, 2004 and the Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning (GSLI) program, 2015. As

a student at MSVU, she has been actively involved in student-led groups, for example, the International Students Society and the ASG, that gained her popularity among the student body at MSVU.

In her final term paper, and as part of the requirement for her GSSL degree, Isha Davis (2015) explains in a very personal way, her learning experience as a student at MSVU [both undergraduate and graduate levels]. After carefully reviewing her report that she had shared with me, I found some similarities that echoed my experience as a student at MSVU.

In her report, Isha questioned whether the degree granted to a Black student holds the same value as one awarded to a White student since her undergraduate degree was not even enough for an entry-level administration position at the university that granted her the degree.

For her practicum in the GSSL program, Isha, in collaboration with the Coordinator of the Mount's Africentric Support Group, created a "Black Student-Faculty" mentorship program with the goal of providing a better learning experience for Black students at MSVU. According to her findings from this project (Davis, 2014), both the students and faculty members benefited enormously, with many Black students learning directly from and about faculty members and vice versa. Both parties gained a different perspective of each other and strengthened the commitment towards enhancing diversity at MSVU.

At the CASAE conference in 2015¹⁰, Isha reflected on her undergraduate and graduate experiences at MSVU. She highlighted the difference in her learning experience as a graduate student and a member of the MSVU Africentric Support Group and her experience as an undergraduate student. She asserted that the ASG provided a buffer for Black students to

¹⁰ Isha, along with other students, were asked to share their learning experience as students at MSVU, as part of my presentation. 2015 CASAE Conference.

securely collaborate and network without having to compete for the already limited resources, such as a meeting space and support staff for Black students, available on campus for students.

Davis, (personal communication, 11th February 2016) stated:

As I look through my time capsule, seven years ago, in the majority of my [undergraduate] classes I was the only ethnic student. My first [graduate] class in 2011 was Introduction to Lifelong Learning. I walked into the classroom as an unknown student, as I glanced around the classroom and saw the diverse learners, I felt at ease and was ready to learn... I asked myself, am I no longer the minority in my classroom?

Melina Kennedy's Experience

Melina, an African Nova Scotian woman, graduated from the Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning (Africentric Cohort) program in 2013. As part of the requirements for the GSSL program, Kennedy's (2012, p.3) practicum, as she puts it, "sought to understand the various hopes, fears, and reservations among the students of African descent and their experience at the university as Black minorities."

Kennedy and three other classmates from the M.Ed. Lifelong Learning program (Africentric Cohort) initiated the Africentric Support Group to understand the learning experiences of Black students enrolled in an undergraduate program at MSVU. The group of ten undergraduate students and four graduate students met at least once a week, she explained, to discuss academic work or just to talk about the issues that affected them [the participants].

Kennedy (2012) found that "students of African descent are looking for faculty that better represents the student population and better understands the diversity and sensitivity of the student community." (p.21). The lack of a formal support system by the university was also one of the reasons identified as affecting the educational experiences of Black students at MSVU.

Kennedy's practicum report was based on data collected informally from African Canadian students with issues about the following, which she concluded were concerns of the African Canadian students in general:

- Cultural disconnection with faculty and or student body
- Class differences
- Absence of Minority Faculty
- Low expectations of Black students
- Negative attention was drawn to skin complexion
- Lack of cultural understanding by faculty and staff
- Lack of cultural or ethnic programming at MSVU

In summary, Kennedy asserts that Black undergraduate students, felt a profound disconnect between their culture and community while attending MSVU. Her findings also revealed that many students did not believe they were adequately equipped, academically (p.14) for the program they were pursuing along with the lack of proper academic advising, (p.16).

Although Kennedy's practicum report was based on only ten (10) students and her data were collected informally, her contribution to the MSVU community has sparked my interest to investigate the learning experiences of Black students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces my thesis topic and provides a contextual framework for the study. It also provides the reader with a historical perspective of the education system in Canada and the African Canadian experience in Nova Scotia. You will also learn a brief history of the contribution MSVU made towards destabilizing the status quo, by providing quality education for young Canadian women.

In this chapter, I also provided the reason for this study by discussing my personal experience and the experiences of two other Black graduate studies students at MSVU, who shared their learning experiences and were influential in the founding of the Africentric Support Group. And finally, I provided a brief description of the research participants to help the reader gain an insight of each participant. In Chapter 2, I will explore known literature about Black students learning experiences.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview: A Canadian Education

In identifying the benefits of education to individuals and their society, I investigated what the literature says about the significance of factors such as socioeconomic ability, ethnicity, identity, and race have on those students that receive an inequitable education.

According to a 2008 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), educational equity is dependent on two main factors:

- Fairness - which implies that factors specific to one's personal conditions should not interfere with the potential for academic success.
- Inclusion - which refers to a comprehensive standard that applies to everyone in a certain education system."¹¹

Yet, despite this notion of educational equity which forms the foundation of our educational system in Nova Scotia, the BLAC Report (1994), unearthed three major discrepancies in the quality of education received by Nova Scotians of European descent and those of African descent. Discrepancies that Faubert (2012); Field, Kuczera and Pont (2007); Woessmann and Schütz (2006, cited by the OECD report 2012, p.15)¹² found, “can redress the effect of broader social and economic inequalities” (p.15).

Black Students’ Learning Experience

Not much is known about Black students’ learning experiences at post-secondary institutions in Canada. However, based on my assumption, there are some similarities to that of the Canadian High School experience. I also assume there are similarities in the literature about the Black experience in the USA and students’ experience in Canada.

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/39989494.pdf> (retrieved on December 6, 2015)

¹² <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/50293148.pdf> (retrieved on April 10, 2017)

Henry (1994), who studied the experiences of Caribbean students in the Ontario school system in Toronto, found that issues such as the Eurocentric bias in the curriculum, bias in textbooks, and the rarity of Caribbean teachers and administrators in the Toronto school system presented barriers to student success. Henry identified two critical issues facing Black students that present enormous difficulty in adaptation. These are the “structural and attitudinal barriers within the educational system itself” (p.134). Systemic racism and the differential treatment of Black students by teachers, administrators, and other students is a significant problem that directly contributes to the lack of achievement.

Although systemic racism and differential treatment were identified as a unique differentiator between Black and White students’ learning experiences in Henry’s study, it is certainly not the only factors that affect all Black students.

Paul (2012, p.18) also found that most of the studies involving Black students in higher education, have focused mainly on their experiences with racism, and have been conducted within the context of predominantly white institutions. Paul’s research, which was conducted in Ontario, possess some striking similarities to studies done by other Canadian researchers, such as Codjoe (1994, 2001) and Kelly (1998) in Alberta, James (2001), Dei (1996, 2006), Henry (1994), and Gordon and Zinga (2012) in Ontario. These studies show that the Black student experience with racism is not localized to a single province.

The “common experience” notion, Dei (1994) noted, is the idea that “all black people of African descent share a common experience, struggle, and origin” (p.4). This would support the notion that the learning experiences faced by Black students in Canada and the USA are somewhat similar to that faced by Black students in the Caribbean and continental Africa, and the rest of the world.

Taylor (1991) found that this “common experience” is affected when teachers harbour negative racial stereotypes about their Black students, which contribute to their negative learning experience. For example, Codjoe (2001, pp.348-349) found that the students in his study had to contend, cope with, and overcome what might be described as “racialized barriers,” which included stereotyping, overt bias and prejudice. These barriers, according to Codjoe (2001) are:

exacerbated by neoconservative thought that ‘the racism/discrimination explanation of black underachievement is no longer viable’ (Harrison, 2000, p. xxi); and that it is ‘Black culture’ which is mainly responsible for Black underachievement (p.334).

From an immigrant’s perspective, Codjoe (2001, p.4) expressed that he was “disturbed by the ‘marginality and depersonalization’ of Canadian students of African origin.” He also added that Black educational theory and practice had not been a priority in mainstream Canadian education when he emigrated to Canada in 1974.

I believe that marginalization and the list of racialized barriers such as racial profiling, prejudice, stereotyping, overt and subtle biases mentioned by Codjoe (p.360) are still present today in our school systems, but become less overt. Further research is required to identify and better understand the barriers Black students face today.

Identity and Negative Racial Stereotyping

How do we get to the core of the negative racial stereotype that severely hampers the successes of Black students? Much of the literature about Black students tend to emphasize the poor academic performance of Black students or issues and problems related to their academic failure, (Irvine, 1990; Lomotey, 1990; Ogbu, 1992 cited in codjoe 2007, p.138).

Some of the typical stereotypes, (Niemann, O’Connor, & McClorie 1998, cited in Codjoe 2007, p.138), were that Black students were “loud, lazy, muscular, criminal, athletic, dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed.”

Indeed, the student narratives showed ‘how everyday interactions are loaded with assumptions made by educators and mainstream society about the capabilities, motivations, and integrity of low-income children and children of colour’ (Book Notes, Harvard Educational Review (1995, cited in Codjoe 2010, p.353).

Codjoe (2001, p.353) points to Mass media as an entity that fuels negative stereotypes, since many of the students in his study “felt that the media has contributed to the negative stereotyping of Black students.” Codjoe highlighted the reactionary research trend that seeks to fix the problem at hand, rather than a proactive approach that aims to understand better the root problem that tends to plague Black students.

As an alternative to the standard way of conducting research with African-Canadian students, Codjoe (2007) focused on “parental support and encouragement in the home environment, where he was able to uncover some factors that contribute to Black students’ academic success” (p.150). This method helped by removing what Dei (1996b, cited in Codjoe 2001, p.345) termed as a ‘racial, cultural and gender “othering” of Black students.’ Codjoe (2001) was able to identify some of the more common stereotypes that affected the participants of his study. In addition to the stereotype that was uncovered, stereotype threat, a concept proposed by Steele and Aronson (1995), were uncovered.

The term stereotype threat, as suggested by Steele and Aronson (1995) was used in several experiments to show that:

Black college freshmen and sophomores performed more poorly on standardized tests than White students when their race was emphasized. When race was not emphasized, however, Black students performed better and equivalently with White students. The

results showed that performance in academic contexts could be harmed by the awareness that one's behavior might be viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes.¹³

Based on research done by Codjoe 2001, James 2003, et al., I believe that understanding stereotype threat is significant to the understanding of Black students experience in and outside the school environment. As Steele rightly points out, people often experience stereotype threat several times a day, based on many identities – such as gender, race, and age.

Bhattacharjee (2003) and Henry & Tator (2010, cited in James 2011, p.3), confirmed Codjoe's finding that Black youths are counted among the most "at risk" students because of their continued disengagement from school, poor academic performance, and high rates of absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, and dropout.

James (2011), like many others, explored the schooling experiences of "at risk" students, more specifically, stereotyping Black Boys, and concluded that "these stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system" (p.21).

Henry and Tator (2005, cited in Hampton, 2010) state that the reality of racism and other forms of oppression experienced by Black and other marginalized youth in Canadian societies causes many to develop fatalistic attitudes about themselves, their education and their future (p.108).

As Small (1994, p.105, cited in Codjoe, 2001) puts it "the stereotyping involved here is systematic, elaborate and based on assumptions of separate racialized groups possessing distinct mental and physical abilities." Codjoe (p.354) added that students then viewed the "stereotypical activity" with some contempt, and as a result would avoid the activity altogether.

¹³ Retrieved from http://diversity.arizona.edu/sites/diversity/files/stereotype_threat_overview.pdf on January 3rd, 2017

Cohen and Garcia (2005) further added that even more subtle are threats based on one's social identity which may be distressing, such as the knowledge that one's behaviour could be used to reinforce a negative stereotype about one's group (p.566).

One such threat was identified by D'Souza, (1995, p.499, cited in Codjoe 2006, p.35), who states that one of the greatest myths about people of African origin is that, as a people, they lack 'the values of scholarship and study' and that they see academic achievement as forms of "acting White."

Moreover, according to Codjoe (1997, p.160), society reckons that "Black kids are supposed to be good in things like...rapping or basketball or involved in some area of sports," since they lack the abilities to excel in academia. Codjoe also found that the only time you see more Black people on television in Canada is during the Olympics.

Codjoe's (1997) student narratives confirm that there is a serious concern in regards to society's overall view of Black students. Sleeter (1991, cited in Codjoe 2001, p.366), argues that minority students may need to develop a strong sense of group identity and action, including a commitment to shared goals, awareness of conflict against a dominant group, and effective organization to overcome the impediment of the dominant culture.

Racism

Racism, as Peterson and Brookfield (2007, p.6) put it, "is difficult because to talk about race you have to dig deep and bring to the surface painful memories, awkward moments, circumstances, and situations that have long been buried. We have to be willing to be exposed, to face rejection", yet, according to Codjoe (2001), all participants experienced racism (both subtle and overt) in one form or another (p 349). Their experiences provided a firsthand insight of the impact of racism and racist attitudes both in and out of school. It also provided insight into how they coped with it.

Despite this claim, Codjoe (2001) only provided minimal information about the obvious occurrences of racism in his study. However, as we review the students' response, we can gain a better understanding of the subtleties of racism as mentioned above. This was also confirmed by Kanu (2008, p.923), who found that the students in her study were "very grateful for the opportunity to be in a safe learning space, given their circumstances....", and have chosen to overlook the issue of racism for a better education/life in Canada.

Dei et al. (1996), wrote extensively on racism in Canada. Yet, every new instance of racism surprises us. It leads us to ask, why is society reacting so slowly to instances of racism? Johnson-Ahorlu (2012), suggests that it is not uncommon for narratives about experiences of racism to be viewed by the majority group with doubt rather than a resource for learning (pp.8-9).

In regards to Black students experience in Canada, Codjoe failed to delve deeper into the cases of racism, as an issue, among participants of his study. He also provided no solid recommendation to suggest that the issue of racism should/can be challenged.

However, there is already enough literature identifying strategies and processes which enhance the student experience of higher education, and that can get to the root of racism. Thomas (2012), contends that an active and engaging curriculum content and pedagogy, Yorke and Longden (2008), suggests that institutional commitment, Jones and Thomas (2005), enhancing student engagement and reducing isolation, are all tested strategies that can be implemented. Singh (2011, cited in Tedam 2015, p.132) reported that this group [Black students] are more likely to succeed in universities where institutional policies promote cohesion amongst the different ethnic groups represented.

Tedam also found that Dhanda (2010, cited in Tedam, p.133) supported these views:

whose study into the experiences of BME students at a university in the West Midlands uncovered low expectations of BME students by staff, a perception of unfairness in the assessment and moderation processes and a lack of support from tutors as contributing to the disparity in attainment between them and their white peers.

It is evident, based on the research (e.g., Codjoe, (2001); James, (2010, 2011); Kanu, (2008); Dei et al., (1995), that there is an underlying problem of racism that fosters disparities in education. For example, participants in Kanu's research experienced the subtle forms of racism through the countless cases of educational and social neglect. While participants of Codjoe's (2001) study reported a more overt form of racism that affected their learning experiences.

Biases in school curriculum and textbooks

As Dei (1996) reflected on his educational experiences, it is important for us to critically analyze the reasons for his frustration with his schooling experience, he states that:

I recall those educational experiences that informed and influenced my thoughts about an inclusive curriculum. My frustrations with the schooling I received in my youth in Ghana were less the result of what the colonial curriculum taught me than of what it did not teach me (p.170).

The lack of relevant information about, in Dei (1996) example, the geography of Ghana and the accessibility to information about Niagara Falls in Canada has caused Dei to examine his learning experience. He added that "the local rivers in my village, the rivers in which I swam, bathed, and caught fish, and from which I fetched water was considered less important than learning about Canada" (pp. 170-171). Dei (1996) further explained that it is not uncommon for African historical experiences and ancestral knowledge to be devalued by Euro-American academic scholarship (p.171).

In a research conducted by Dei (1996), through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, to understand the role of Africentricity in the inclusive curriculum in Canadian Schools, Dei found that, “there is a dearth of critical educational research specifically about the inclusive curriculum in Canadian schools” (p.171). Using an anti-racist framework, Dei (1993, cited in Codjoe 2001) “acknowledges the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society and the urgency for an educational system that is more inclusive and is capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling” (p.368).

Dei (1996) said that “developing an ‘inclusive curriculum’ that highlights Afrocentric knowledge will be a difficult task in Canadian schools” (p.170). This warning was found to be true two decades later when Brown (2015) reported on the issues that continue to plague Canada’s only Africentric grade school. Brown (2015) reported that one of the leading arguments concerned the content of the curriculum and whether it was Africentric enough.

The African Nova Scotian population, through the BLAC Report (1994), recognized the need for teaching and learning material that reflects the cultural identity of African Nova Scotian students (p.19). The report found that school curriculum in School Boards across Nova Scotia did not adequately reflect the diversity of the Canadian population. Furthermore, the little mention of Blacks in the curriculum was often inaccurate and stereotypical.

Drawing from research conducted by Ndura (2004) from the University of Nevada, who analyzed six ESL textbooks that were used in some elementary and secondary schools in the USA, I was able to demonstrate the effects a biased curriculum has on Black students future career. Ndura (2004) found that of the list of seven types of gender bias proposed by Sadker and

Sadker (2001, cited in Ndura, 2004): invisibility, linguistic bias, stereotyping, imbalance, unreality, fragmentation and cosmetic bias. Three, stereotyping, invisibility and unreality were the major forms of bias (p.146) and were more likely to be found in textbooks. Similar to the BLAC Report, Ndura (2004) also found that the textbooks were misrepresenting and underrepresenting the cultural minorities and their life experiences (p.144). Ndura (2004, p.143) stated, “the content of instructional materials significantly affects students’ attitudes and dispositions towards themselves, other people and society.”

Ndura (2004) explained the three major forms of bias, in her findings, as follow:

Stereotyping- Ndura described Stereotyping as “portraying one set of people exhibiting one set of values, behaviors, and roles.” She further points out that, stereotypically, “Africa is seen as a land devoid of human potential and complexities, a land whose only interesting aspects are the Egyptian mummies and the animals” (p.147).

Invisibility- “referring to the omission of information regarding any of the main variables (Banks, 2001) that make up our individual and collective cultural identity and of the influence that they exert on our everyday life” (p.147).

Unreality – Ndura described unreality as “a technique in which controversial topics such as discrimination and prejudice are avoided in favour of a more idealistic and traditional view of national history or current issues” (p.148). For example, where major stories were distorted, stressing, as Ndura puts it, “where the writers were trained to overlook the details and present the “big picture” (p.148). Frosch et al. (1984, cited in Ndura, p.149) suggest that inclusive books should portray all characters in a non-sexist manner, represent racial and ethnic diversity, as well as depict people with disabilities in a positive light.

Codjoe (2001), agreeing with Ndura, points out that Black students in his study were faced with an alienating curriculum and teachers who do not expect much of them. This has led Codjoe to describe the school environment as ‘essentially solitary,’ unsupportive, alienating and perhaps racially hostile (p.359).

Henry (1970, cited in Ndura 2004, p.144) argues that textbooks are plagued with biases as omission, misconstructured information, and stereotypes. She concludes, “if you cannot be permitted to put the whole TRUTH, all the information regarding the truth, into the brain of the student, you will not cause profound understanding about the past. Moreover, then there will be no understanding of how to deal with the present” (pp. 243–244).

Research conducted by Parris and Brigham (2010) involving twenty (20) African Nova Scotian students in a graduate Africentric cohort at MSVU, provided information about the success of an Africentric cohort at MSVU that was directly influenced by the BLAC Report. The Africentric cohort was set up to “address the under-representation of African Nova Scotian educators in leadership roles, to increase the human resource pool of qualified educators capable of assuming leadership roles and in the education sector in general,” according to Brigham (2007, p4).

Brigham (2007) pointed to the uniqueness of the program when she mentioned that, “program planning was done in a partnership between MSVU and CACE (through an educational committee).” She further stated that all 20 participants of the cohort were fully funded by scholarships paid for by the Nova Scotia government (p.82).

Brigham (Personal communication, October, 2014) revealed that the Africentric Cohort was successful in accomplishing its goals since the program has resulted in at least three Ph.D. candidates and a number of community leaders, however, there is a lack of literature to support the success of the program.

Parris and Brigham (2010) reported a participant as saying “In the Afrocentric cohort I was much more connected to the [course] content so I was concerned about doing things well to get an accurate picture of what is going on” (p.211). Parris and Brigham (2010, pp. 213-214) further found that students believed the content, pedagogy and cohort model provided motivation, support and a sense of safety to discuss critical issues in lifelong learning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the Canadian education system, with the goal of locating the Black learners in an age-old government policy geared towards providing an inclusive education for its citizens.

In the chapter, I looked at scholarly works done that identify the learning experiences of Black students. Within the literature, I found some common issues that work against Black students in academic. I presented some of these issues found by researchers like Codjoe, Dei, Paul, Brigham, and James. For example:

- Identity and negative racial stereotype
- Racism
- Biases in the school curriculum and textbooks

I discussed the lack of research done on Black students in post-secondary institutions in Canada and presented valid reasons for being able to use a parallel to research done in the USA to inform my work.

In Chapter 2, I also drew from the BLAC Report on Education to address some of the inequities experienced by the African Nova Scotian community. I concluded this chapter by referring to the research done by Parris and Brigham involving 20 African Nova Scotian graduate students, that was a direct response to the BLAC Report.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my reasons for using a qualitative methodology and present the Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM) as a methodology of choice for this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research was conducted using the qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interview techniques were employed when conducting interviews. The interviewer asked open-ended questions, which were developed in advance, see appendix, in a sequential manner, along with some prepared probes, was used, where necessary.

Utilizing the semi-structured interview method for this research allowed participants to freely tell their story, within the limitations of the guided questions/probes. This method enabled me to notice cues I believe might be useful to the final analysis.

Drawing from the Africentric paradigm, Mkabela (2005, pp.183-4) made strong recommendations when conducting research involving indigenous African communities, to employ an African-centered qualitative approach for data collection.

Mkabela (2005) argues that an Africentric research method is “necessary to examine all data from the standpoint of Africans as subjects and human agents rather than as objects in a European frame of reference” (p.179).

To achieve this, Aladejebi (2015, p.78-9) suggests an Africentric Informed Qualitative Methodology (AIQM). AIQM suggests cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance as the best approach to understanding African phenomena. Mkabela (2005, cited by Aladejebi (2015, p.79) also argues that AIQM provides a framework for moving from hegemonic Eurocentric research perspectives into African-centered qualitative methodologies that preserve the integrity and sensibility of African cultural identity.

This has led Aladejebi (2015, pp.78-79) to explore and embrace Mazama’s (2003) “Seven criteria for the establishment of an Afrocentric methodology”:

- Ensuring that participants’ experience is the bedrock of the study

- Exploring the response and coping mechanism of participants throughout the course of this study
- Locating myself within the process as an active participant rather than a mere observer
- Acknowledging the totality – spirit, body, and mind – of participants’ experiences and their extended human connectivity.
- Not taking for granted nor being dismissive of participants’ lived experiences even when they cannot be empirically validated.
- Acknowledging the complexity of human experiences by understanding that experiences analyzed were not the end in themselves.
- Working towards providing feedback and creating means of redress for identified issues and concerns.

In recognition of its applicability, suitability, and for accountability reasons, I also embrace the AIQM for research conducted within a community involving participants of African descent. According to Pellerin (2012, p. 149, cited by Aladejebi 2015, p.79), “AIQM is crucial because conventional research methodologies are culturally destitute to effectively embrace the historical, social, or contemporary experiences of African people involved in research.”

Hountondji’s (1997, cited in Mkabela 2005, p.180), who placed an urgent call for an African perspective to research, so we can understand the long-term benefits of conducting research that utilizes AIQM for indigenous groups, stated that the “study of traditional knowledge as a component of African culture has direct implications for the future development of generations of researchers in this continent.”

The shift from the norm, to AIQM, Mkabela (2005, p.180), “challenges the dominant world-view of research and the production of knowledge by avoiding a model of technocratic rationality that restricts diversity regarding research methods.” Mkabela (2005, p.181) reminds us that “if research is to be Africentric, the African indigenous people must be in control of and participate in the entire research process, from beginning to end.” It is from this viewpoint she presented three types of African paradigms for us to consider:

- Indigenous community involvement in the research process.
- Indigenous community control in the research process.
- Research not involving indigenous communities

For the purpose of this research, I chose the first two paradigms, Indigenous community involvement in the research process and Indigenous community control in the research process, as they are relevant and applicable to my research.

An inquiry into the learning experience of Black/African descent students, according to Asante, must, therefore, select participants from the Diaspora, as opposed to relying on the objective-based observations of an external entity. The researcher, from the Africentric perspective, must also demonstrate agency, and as Mkabela states, “this type of research might create more effective, more sustainable, more rational, and more genuine educational improvement processes.”

As an advocate for the use of the Africentric paradigm, Mkabela recommends the active involvement of the participants, and according to Aladejebi (2015), researchers are encouraged to become visible within the context of their study and become active participants in the research process...,” Mkabela (p.183) further states that “participation alone is not enough to qualify the research activity as Africentric.” However, she states that:

this approach allows researchers to establish rapport, convene, catalyze, facilitate, adapt, 'hand over the stick,' watch, listen, learn, and respect. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples' sense of empowerment grows as they map, model, diagram, interview, quantify, rank and score, inform and explain, show, discuss and analyze, plan, present, and share their knowledge and experience with others (p.183).

Mkabela (p.182) warned of the consequences of indigenous people's disengagement when they become subjects of the research process. She informed us that,

some national development objectives and policies, as conceived by national-level officials and processes, have not always been consistent with the views, wishes, and interests of indigenous communities affected by them. Some policies have had a severe negative impact on indigenous communities' lives, including culture loss and alienation of learners from their communities (p.182).

In recognition of this Africentric paradigm and the need for a better learning experience for Black students at MSVU, I drew on my personal experience as an undergraduate student and now a graduate student at MSVU. My personal experience as a student along with my experience as the ASG Coordinator over the past five years was brought to the forefront my connection to this research.

Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Shank, 2006, p.153) recommends that we deal with the issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability, which Shank (2006) called 'research bias,' the biggest threat to qualitative research (p.153). Auerbach & Silverstein (2003, cited in Collins-Warfield, 2008) states that qualitative research calls for the researcher to reflect upon his or her biases to approach the research responsibly, so as not to be oppressive or force ideas upon the participants (p.35).

In a qualitative Africentric research design there is an acknowledgment that bias is inevitable. Reviere (2001) approached this by stating, “the Africentric scholar assumes the right and responsibility to describe reality from his or her own perspective” (p.711). I was able to be open to the research participants and reflective in the research process about my positionality and subjectivity as the researcher.

I also relied on the principles of Ma'at and Nommo, which Asante (1987, 1990, cited in Reviere 2001, p.711) has identified as two principles that are intrinsic to African cultures wherever they may be found, they are:

Ma 'at - "the quest for justice, truth, and harmony," and in the context of this article it refers to the research exercise itself, in harmony with the researcher, being used as a tool in the pursuit of truth and justice. The ultimate goal of Ma'at is that of helping to create a fairer and just society.

Nommo - "the productive word," and here it describes the creation of knowledge as a vehicle for improvement in human relations.

Reviere (2001) further suggests that these two principles allow the researcher to draw from their experience and the experiences of others. This she identified as “important and traditional in African cultures and necessary for the proper and more complete construction and interpretation of knowledge” (p. 711).

Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data collected, I relied on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), put forward by Smith and Osborn (2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007), the aim of interpretivist perspective is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world (pp.53, 55). Smith also emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process (p.53). From

an interpretivist perspective, I believe the participants in my study were allowed to create their interpretation of their learning experiences, based on their context.

Smith states that “there is no right answer to the question of the sample size” (p.56). However, Smith points out that a distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included and many researchers recognize that this can only realistically be done on a very small sample.

The Research Participants

For this research, I conducted a preliminary focus group interview before conducting individual interviews. In utilizing this semi-structured interview method, I allowed participants to “explore the subject from as many angles as they please,” according to Gillespie et al. (2016). According to Gillespie, conducting a focus group before individual interviews will allow a group of people who have things in common and feel relaxed talking to each other to greater participation and awareness (p.145). Shank (2006) further found that focus groups are most useful for getting at complex underlying notions in a setting where the sharing of experiences can help guide the other participants to greater awareness and participation (p.48).

I then conducted an individual interview with the ten (10) participants. The focus of this investigation was on interviewing participants of African descent who self-identified as Black/African from each of the following groupings:

- Three students from Canada
- Three students from the Caribbean and Bermuda
- Four students from Africa

To be selected to participate in my research, participants must have been born and raised, until age thirteen, in the specified region. All participants have received at least an elementary

education from their native land/region, before moving to Canada (only applicable to students that indicate they are from Africa and the Caribbean region).

Efforts were made to ensure that there were at least one male and one female participant from each of the geographical area, as stated above, to understand if gender also plays a role in the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU. Also, I ensured that all participants were at least the age of majority, nineteen years old (19), according to the laws of Nova Scotia, when conducting the interview.

Participants for this study were selected from the current student population of Mount Saint Vincent University and recent graduates (post-2013 graduates, who maintained at least 1 year membership with the ASG) of Black/African descent. Each student also indicated on their MSVU application that they were a Black/African descent, or held membership with the ASG.

Within each category, efforts were made to include at least one *Graduate Student* and one *Undergraduate Student*. All participants have completed at least one full year of study at MSVU.

Who are the participants?

I will use this opportunity to introduce the participants in this study, by their pseudonyms. To understand how the participants were selected, please see the participant section below.

Africa	Canada	The Caribbean and Bermuda
Berko (male)	Abioye (male)	Nuru (male)
Nubia (female)	Aster (female)	Imani (female)
Efua (female)	Naak(female)	Ife (female)
Amaka (female)		

Figure 1: The table above shows the participant's region of origin and their pseudonyms.

Berko (Son first born) – an international student from West Africa who is enrolled in an undergraduate professional studies program at MSVU. Before embarking on his studies at MSVU, Berko attended a Catholic High School that was exclusively for boys.

Throughout his high school years, Berko received mentorship and academic advice from his teachers. He also received support from his family, community, and peers who helped in creating the very independent person he is today. Berko found similar mentorship and support when he joined the ASG in 2015 and quickly became an active member of the group.

“a storm in a teacup.”

~Berko

Berko used the idiom above to describe his experience at MSVU. He believes that although the little things in life deserve your immediate attention, they should not be able to throw you off course if you have a solid foundation. After completing his studies, Berko plans to travel back to his country to manage an industry, be a part of an organization or to get involved in human resource management.

Nubia (From Nubia) – an international student that is currently enrolled in the Masters of Arts Women and Gender Studies program at MSVU. After completing High School and an undergraduate degree at a university in Africa, Nubia worked for two years before deciding to continue her academic career at MSVU.

Coming to Canada to continue her studies posed a unique struggle for Nubia because of the entirely different learning environment compared to her schooling in her home country, Nigeria. Her professors and classmates were all African. She, however, credits the ASG for the support she received during her first year at MSVU.

Nubia joined the ASG, about four months into her studies at MSVU, to understand better what the ASG was all about, and immediately recognized the importance of this office for Black students.

*“The ASG made me aware of my identity, in a way”
~ Nubia*

Ever since she joined the ASG, Nubia has begun researching on her own self-awareness. “I would say the ASG has made me want to identify as a Black person,” she stated.

She desires to see Black students get involved in the lives of ASG from day one and to see the ASG office staffed with at least one full-time staff person.

Efua (Friday born child) – A female international student who enrolled in the Master of Public Relations (MPR) program in 2015. During her studies at MSVU, Efua was employed both on and off campus, which contributed significantly to her academic and professional success and financial stability while in Canada. After completing two-years of studies at MSVU Efua was immediately employed in her field.

After joining the ASG in her second year, Efua applied her strong diversity of skills, for example, social media, promotion and photography skills, to help create a stronger ASG and her Public Relations training to launch the ASG on several social media platforms. She became one of the key organizers of, “The Fabric of our DNA” an annual fashion show established to fund a Black student scholarship at MSVU.

Efua believes that a Black student should come to university as a confident person, even if it is their first time away from their home or country, and not to be deterred by any form of discrimination.

Amaka (God is gorgeous) – an international student from Ghana, West Africa, who enrolled as a student at MSVU in 2015 in a Master’s degree¹⁴. Amaka attended university about five years earlier as an exchange student to Canada for three (3) months. However, 2015 was her first experience of being enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and her first visit to Nova Scotia.

Her high school and undergraduate studies were completed in Ghana, where she also received most of her informal education.

Amaka’s previous academic institutions were a place where she felt she belonged and was free to learn. This motivated her to be excellent at everything she does. As a strategic learner, Amaka remarked that she would usually look beyond many circumstances, irrespective of how uncomfortable she felt in the situation, and establish a teaching and learning opportunity.

During her studies in Canada, Amaka received the support of the Africentric Group and other members of the Ghanaian community in Nova Scotia. In the same manner, Amaka can always be seen assisting other Black students with their academic work, while still helping others to better adapt to university life.

“I think I have applied myself more to ASG than I have with other places.”
~ Amaka

Amaka would like to be remembered by the MSVU community for the contributions she made to the ASG. Along with her degree, Amaka stated that she would also be better equipped to facilitate cultural differences, which is a great asset in her field of study.

Naak (Golden) – a Canadian born student who received all of her formal education in Nova Scotia, and is currently enrolled at MSVU in a professional studies program at the undergraduate

¹⁴ NB: to protect the identity Amaka I will not mention her program of study, since she was the only Black student enrolled in her program at the time.

level. After completing an undergraduate degree at another local institution, Naak took a break from university for several years. Naak reported that she has only ever attended schools that were predominantly White, and has only ever lived in predominantly White neighbourhoods around Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

Her first undergraduate degree experience was memorable for its unwelcoming and isolating learning environment. She found MSVU to be more inviting. However, unlike her high school experience, Naak has yet to sit in a class instructed by a Black professor.

Naak's high school was located in a predominantly White school district, but there was still a significant Black community presence and support in the school system for Black students. Her high school also offered African studies courses that were taught by people of African descent. In contrast, Naak was not aware of any offerings of African/Black history courses at her post-secondary institutions.

Naak made every attempt to become involved at MSVU. She joined several societies and groups but still experienced alienation, isolated and treatment as an outsider, except with the ASG. She found that the faculty members in her department were accommodating. However, she had little to no interaction with staff, except for the custodial staff.

Aster (Star) - Aster identifies as African Canadian student, and although she is not native to Nova Scotia, she shares similar experiences that are common among the provinces of the Maritimes, where her educational background was established.

Aster is currently enrolled as a part-time student in a Master of Education degree at MSVU.

When she initially applied to MSVU in 2014, she intended to take one graduate course to add to her continued education but was encouraged to pursue the MEd. by several MSVU faculty members and the ASG Coordinator.

Going back to school and realizing her dreams meant that Aster would have to make some family sacrifices and professional career adjustments. However, as a strategic learner and meticulous thinker who loves to learn and seeks out opportunities for both formal and informal learning, this investment was worth her time and resources, as it would add to her current knowledge and impact her life.

Although her elementary and secondary school career was not ideal for fostering a successful candidate for advancing to the next stage of her education, Aster was able to beat the odds and successfully thrive in the environment. These successes, she claimed, occurred because she loved to learn and she had a robust support system at home. She later went on to study at a local university.

Aster considers herself very lucky, as she has realized that her entry into the Mount was somewhat non-traditional. However, after joining the ASG in 2015, Aster remained committed to providing support to Black students on campus.

Abioye (The son of royalty) – is a Canadian born student who received all of his formal education in Nova Scotia, and is currently enrolled at MSVU in a professional studies program at the undergraduate level.

Before joining MSVU, Abioye attended J.L. Ilsey High School, where he was mentored and encouraged to pursue post-secondary education by his teachers. In addition to this encouragement, Abioye was encouraged by his family and the local community to continue his academic career.

“even though MSVU is not a big school, you can get lost very easily, and I found that it was hard first-year, ...”

~ Abioye

Abioye reported that his first year at MSVU was,

pretty nerve-racking, I did not know what was going on at first, or where I was going at the time. I just sat in the back of the class and did not interact with anyone, until I took a few classes, which had a group work component and demanded interaction with others.

At MSVU, Abioye received support from family, and the ASG, and found friendships that he developed while playing intramural basketball.

Ife (Woman of love) – an international student from Jamaica who came to study at MSVU in 2016, and is currently enrolled in a Masters of Education program.

Before her studies at MSVU, Ife completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts and Secondary Teacher Education with a major in Social Studies and a minor in History, at a local institution in Jamaica.

Ife explained that she worked and lived on campus during her undergraduate studies, which she found to be a bit challenging because she only lived two hours from the campus. Studying at MSVU is similar, since she still has to travel to get home, if she factors in the distance and time, she explained.

“Failure is not an option.”

~ Ife

Ife’s undergraduate experience was steeped in an environment of mentorship and support from her university community, family and social circles. The quote “Failure is not an option,” is a signed promise made between each student and her undergraduate university, who provided the necessary support to ensure each student succeeds. Her family provided the necessary supports towards her success, including financial and emotional support, while her community provided both formal and informal learning opportunities.

Before MSVU, Ife’s learning experiences were in predominantly Black/African circles, which made learning for her a bit easier. This kind of support was provided by the ASG at MSVU, she

claimed. Since joining the ASG, Ife actively encouraged Black/African students to utilize the support services offered by the group.

Ife's dream of becoming a Curriculum Writer will materialize after completing her degree at MSVU, and she hopes to take the knowledge she receives from MSVU back to Jamaica to enhance the school curriculum in her local community.

Imani (Faithful person) – a fourth-year international student at MSVU, currently enrolled in an undergraduate professional studies program. She is also the second child from her family to study at MSVU.

Before immigrating to Canada, Imani completed high school and subsequently, a degree at the College of the Bahamas. After a brief break from her academic career, Imani decided to transfer to MSVU to continue her academic career.

Imani is passionate about building an active community. In fact, during her studies at the College of the Bahamas, Imani was involved in many student-led groups. At MSVU, Imani also became involved with the ASG and Caribbean Society, which speaks to her commitment towards a better student experience.

Her lived experiences, and cultural experience established in a predominantly Black/African environment, and as such, Imani reminisced on the opportunities, she had to learn from her Black teachers and college professors and the bonds she formed with fellow students based on shared cultural and lived experiences.

*“I have never had a black professor at this school”
~ Imani*

Although schooling in Canada was different and sometimes tricky, Imani praises her family and the society in which she was brought up, for equipping her with the necessary skills required for the transition from schooling in the Bahamas to Canada.

While studying at MSVU, Imani lives on campus to get the full student experience. She is grateful for the support she receives from the ASG and her family.

Nuru (Filled with light) - is an international student in his third-year at MSVU. He received his formal, elementary and secondary, education in the West Indies before immigrating to Canada as in 2014 to begin post-secondary studies in Business Administration at MSVU.

When Nuru immigrated to Canada, he chose to live on campus for accessibility and to be able to transition smoothly to post-secondary studies. However, he found that post-secondary studies in Canada were entirely different from his high school experience.

During high school, Nuru received a significant amount of support and guidance from his family, friends, teachers and the local community. He is grateful that he had this support which pointed him in the direction of higher education. As an extrovert, he found it easy to socially integrate at MSVU, but very difficult to find his footing academically. He spent most of his time getting adjusted to his new environment, during his first and second year in Canada.

Like many Black students, Nuru received the invitation to join the ASG within his first week on campus but remained an inactive member. However, he always knew he could come to the ASG any time he needed help.

“The Africentric Support Group is a place where young Black students could come and feel safe.”

~ Nuru

Nuru loves learning and is planning to go back to the Bahamas after graduation to start a business and teach his local community some of what he learned from the Canadian context.

Rationale for the sample size

A sample size of ten (10) students was selected based on the overall student population at MSVU. According to its website, there are approximately 4000¹⁵ registered students, and according to internal reports, 127 of the 4000¹⁶ (approx. 3%) students self-identified as “Black/African Descent” on their application. The researcher believes that, for a qualitative study, the sample size is a reasonable reflection of the proportion of Black/African student population.

Although I suspected that the learning experience of Black/African students was somewhat similar, I was still able to avoid generalizing the experiences.

Participants were not be randomly selected, as the intention was to follow the guidelines, as specified in the “Participants section” earlier. The selection was made through referrals and the relationship developed through the Mount’s Africentric Support Group.

Advertising for participants was done through the ASG. Initial contact was made to all enrolled students that are Black/African descent at Mount Saint Vincent University about this study. An official invitation for potential participants was emailed to all Black/African descent students.

Additionally, posters were placed in strategic locations on campus, for example, the library, student union building, international office, residence, the cafeteria and the Africentric Support Office.

All who express interest were pre-screened to meet the requirements for the prearranged categories, as indicated in the “Participants section” above. Potential participants for those sections that have not been filled within the week of the poster were contacted.

¹⁵ Information retrieved from <http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/default.aspx> on November 10, 2016.

¹⁶ Information taken from an unpublished internal enrollment report produced by the MSVU Institutional Analyst. 2015 enrollment.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis. Email communications were sent to all enrolled on-campus students of African descent at MSVU, to inform them about the study and to express the need for their participation in the study. Communications went out to students of African descent that have recently graduated from MSVU and were active participants in the Mount's Africentric Support Group. Selected participants, as stipulated in the "Participants section," formed the core group for the research.

The study followed the core guidelines surrounding the ethical principles of conducting research as stated by the Canadian Tri-council Policy Statement (TCPS)¹⁷ ethical conduct for research involving humans. (2010, p.6)

One of the main ethical guidelines for conducting research stresses the importance of privacy and confidentiality as critical to the research process. The (TCPS) document states that "privacy risk arise at all stages of the research lifecycle, including an initial collection of information, use, and analysis to address research questions, dissemination of findings, storage and retention of information, and disposal of records or devices on which information is stored." (p.55). The (TCPS) document also defined confidentiality as, "the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information" (p.56).

For this study, I anticipate that there were going to be minimal to no risk to participants, taking this and the cautionary reminder laid out by the TCPS into consideration. I then explored every avenue to ensure that participants' privacy and confidentiality, within the context of this study, were securely stored.

¹⁷ Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, December 2010.

To make sure that the research adheres to the policies, as proposed by the (TCPS), all information/data disclosed during the investigation process, and that pertains to the research, were stored on an external hard drive, and offline. The external storage device securely kept in a locked cabinet, in the researcher's office at MSVU, when it was not in use.

This thesis adheres to the principles, as proposed above, by keeping all information disclosed during interviews in the strictest confidence. Only the researcher and his supervisor had access to information disclosed. Specific names, personal information, and academic records were not released unless explicit and written instruction is provided by the participant to do so. None of the participants made a request to disclose their identity during the research. When the research is complete, electronic interviews were printed, the electronic files were also uploaded to MAXQDA to perform the thematic analysis. The files will be automatically deleted in June 2018, and the printed information will be stored in a secure location for twelve months and then destroyed. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the printed information during this twelve-month holding period.

Given that ten (10) participants were interviewed for this thesis, the researcher was cognizant of the implication of dealing with human participants and adhere to the protection of human, cultural, and psychological dignity. The (TCPS) argued that respect and protection of the fundamental rights of all humans must be protected and this is achieved by seeking, "their free, informed and ongoing consent" (p.9). The researcher also adhered to the protection of a person with diminished capacity and greater vulnerabilities, if applicable to any participants.

The aim of this thesis is to make a positive contribution towards the argument for a better learning experience for Black/African students at a post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia. Therefore, it was important that any harm to potential participants be eliminated or reduced

during the interview process. Having the researcher conducting all the interviews is one way of minimizing the risk of potential harm.

This thesis also adheres to the principle of respect for free and informed consent. A general understanding of the aim of the research were communicated to participants. A reminder was given to inform participants that participation in this research is voluntary. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent document before conducting the interview. The researcher explained to the participants that they could withdraw from the interview process at any time. Participants were also be informed that they have the freedom not to answer a question if they are uncomfortable responding and to withdraw information that was already provided that may be deemed detrimental to them in the future.

The above are guidelines that this research followed.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained the qualitative research process used and discussed the methods of the inquiry for this thesis. I drew on the research done by Mkbela (2005) to discuss the importance of an Africentric Informed Qualitative methodology (AIQM) in studies involving African peoples and explained Mazama (2003) Seven criteria for the establishment of an Africentric methodology.

This chapter also explained the recruitment process and discussed how the participants were selected for the study. It then discussed the reasons for having a focus group interview before conducting the one-to-one interviews.

I then presented how I will analyze the data using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as proposed by Smith and Osborn (2007)

I provided a detail description of each research participants, to give the reader some ideas about the lived experiences of the participants, without disclosing their identities. Finally, I presented

my rationale for the sample size, which was influenced by the number of registered Black students and the size of the university.

In chapter four, I present Africentricity and Critical Race Theory, as the essential theoretical framework for this thesis

CHAPTER FOUR – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was conducted using the following theories as its framework:

- Africentricity
- Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Africentricity: Theory and Philosophy

Asante (1991) states that “Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person” (p.171). He also informed us that “The Africentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person.” (p. 171)

According to Asante (2014, p.2), the theory of Africentricity is rooted in the pursuit of human knowledge from a culturally and historically located perspective of the African subject. He points out that Africentricity questions moral, political, and intellectual justifications of universal values in clear epistemological rupture against what he called Westernity. He defined Westernity as:

a European form of particularism that has, ‘a paradigmatic insistence that portrays values of the Euro-American culture as culturally dominant and naturally conquering [with] the characteristics of the most invasive aspects of contemporary European and American cultural and social behaviors [for the purpose of] the promotion of European, meaning white, dominance in all sectors of society’ (p.8)

In “*The Afrocentric Idea in Education*,” Asante (1991) found that there are fundamental problems with the education of the African person. Asante further agreed with Woodson (1933) who concluded that:

African Americans have been educated away from their culture and traditions and attached to the fringes of European culture; thus dislocated from themselves, Woodson

asserts that African Americans often valorize European culture to the detriment of their own heritage. (p.170)

The dislocation and experiencing our culture through the lens of Europe helped to form the core premise on which the principle of Africentrism lies.

Brigham (2007) points out, there are several understandings of Africentricity (also referred to as Afrocentricity) and a number of theorists that proposed their understandings. The accepted consensus is that the theory of Afrocentricity was coined by Asante. For this research, I will be using the definition proposed by Asante (1980, cited in Davidson 2010). Which is that:

Africentricity is a philosophical paradigm that emphasizes the centrality and agency of the African person within a historical and cultural context. As such, it is a rejection of the historic marginality, and racial alterity often expressed in the conventional paradigm of European racial domination. (p.35)

Asante (1995, cited in Mkabela 2005, p.180) states that “A fundamental aim of Afrocentricity is that all cultural centers must be respected. Afrocentricity is not colorconscious; it is not a matter of color but of culture that matters in the orientation to centeredness.”

Bakari (1997) adds that “Afrocentricity is a critical reconstruction that dares to restore missing and hidden parts of the African American historical self-formation. Notably, Afrocentricity seeks to restore the African identity of African people” (p.2). He mentioned that “African epistemology already existed at the base of African American culture” (p.2). This African epistemology, according to Kochalumchuvattil (2010), “revolved around a universal recognition of human worth which formed the spiritual foundation of African societies. The name given to the underlying philosophy is *Ubuntu*” (p. 109). Kochalumchuvattil states, that in the Ubuntu philosophy, “the self is defined in terms of relationships with others” (p. 111).

Further elaboration on the Africentric theory requires that Black/African people accept that we have not only been removed physically but spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, from our culture. As Asante puts it, we are decentered:

To say that we are decentered means essentially that we have lost our own cultural footing and become other than our cultural and political origins, dis-located and dis-oriented. We are essentially insane, that is, living an absurdity from which we will never be able to free our minds until we return to the source. Afrocentricity as a theory of change intends to re-locate the African person as subject. . . As a pan-African idea, Afrocentricity becomes the key to the proper education of children and the essence of an African cultural revival and, indeed, survival. (Asante, 1995, p. 1, cited in Mkabela 2005, p.2)

Therefore, the Africentric approach seeks in every situation to appropriate centrality of the African person; it directly addresses the need for an African/Black person to be the ‘agent’ of their cultural experiences, to author their stories and to see the world through their own eyes. In his article, *The removal of agency from Africa*, Shahada (2007) warned against the denial of African agency. He stated that “When African history is reduced the underlining conclusion we find, irrespective of the author being a British liberal, American conservative, or Australian is the same: Africa has fostered nothing the Western World considers artifacts of civilization” (p.1). Shahada further identified that “people speak from their cultural perspective; this in itself is not a problem” (p. 3). The issue is, therefore when the tragedy or triumph of a “community” is determined and defined by someone else.

When the past is repudiated, the next step is the obliteration of the future. The only thing worse than too much nostalgia is amnesia
~ Rave Zacharias

The denial of agency, as inferred by Thiong'o, (1986) leads to the obliteration of the future for the African people. As stated in his book, *Decolonizing the Mind*, “To control a people's culture

is to control their tools of self-determination in relationship to others” (p.16), in referencing the effects of colonization on African countries. Thiong’o went on to state that colonialism involved two aspects of the same process “ the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevating of the language of the colonizer” (p. 16).

Woodson (1933), in *The Miseducation of the Negro*, taught us that the essence of Africentricity embraces the notion of community and the promotion of a collective group above the individual. This sentiment is embraced by writers such as Asante (1988), Kochalumchuvattil (2010), Thiong'o, (1986) and others, as the only way for the African community to be able to take the initiative in restructuring the basis for the educational messages and values which subconsciously and consciously shape the self-esteem and achievements of all African people in the education system.

At a Regional Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) in 2015, I presented on the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU by using an ordinary chessboard to illustrate some of the barriers Black students faced. The presentation, “CHECKMATE: Unpacking the educational experience of Black students at Mount Saint Vincent University,”¹⁸ demonstrated what the removal of agency looks like in academia and how it affects Black learners.

By using an ordinary chessboard, I placed a black pawn on one end of the board to represent a Black student. I then placed 16 white pieces on the opposite side of the board (one king, one queen, two rooks, two knights, two bishops, and eight pawns) to randomly represent members of

¹⁸ This paper was also presented at the 2015 School Counsellors Symposium at MSVU <http://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/Documents/SCS%20Schedule%202015.pdf>

the MSVU community that are White. The white pieces were strategically placed to simulate a perfect “checkmate scenario” favouring the white pieces.

Using this setup, I then explained that without “agency” Black students are isolated and are faced with disparities in the educational system that puts them at a disadvantage. As a step towards alleviating this problem, I called for urgent changes to the curriculum for one that reflects the identity of Black students and for the hiring of Black faculty that would provide an African perspective in the classroom.

An Africentric perspective “provides an analysis and interpretation of daily life from the standpoint of African people as subjects rather than objects on the fringes of world experiences (Asante, 1988; Hilliard, 1998; Wilson, 1998; Ashanti, 2003)” (Brigham, 2007, p.2). Brigham states that “in the face of North America’s ugly historical and present treatment of Aboriginal peoples, those of African descent, and others in the minority and marginalized groups a mere nod toward other perspectives will not do,” (p.3). This position supports the need for a radical shift in the approach to enacting any change in our society today.

This radical shift, according to Reviere (2001), means that we must “acquire and use data that are necessary and pertinent literature to the virtually silent views of African and other non-European communities” (p.709). Mkabela, who supports Reviere’s proposed idea, adds that “the Afrocentric paradigm locates research from an African viewpoint and creates Africa’s own intellectual perspective.” (p.180).

In considering Africentricity, the notion of race, racism, and culture are brought to the forefront. Woodson’s (1933) recommendation for a shift in the way we interact in our society must be taken into consideration. Africentricity, therefore, calls on Blacks to construct new ways to tell their stories and to contribute to the literature about the African culture in Canada.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Mari Matsuda (1991, cited in Savas p.507) defined CRT as:

the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination.

Associating CRT with education has led Ladson-Billings to title her 1998 article, “Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?” Although Critical Race Theory has its roots in American law, its applicability to education is used to address the inequities of a biased educational system. As Tate (1991, cited in Parris and Brigham 2010) found, “a central factor of CRT is that it brings race and racism from the margins of lifelong learning discourse to the center with the objective of sustaining a politicized discourse by and about people of colour” (p.207).

It is my belief that Africentricity and CRT must frame this research, given that both theories examine the effect of factors such as racism, inequity, and other socially constructed terms, which continue to attack the identity of minority groups. The interconnectivity of both theories is crucial in telling a personal story from the vantage point of a Black student in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) today.

Race and racism exist in our society, and they can be subtle at times, while on other occasions are overt. Russell (1992, pp. 762-763, cited in Solórzano, 1998,) added that that race and racism are endemic, permanent, and, “a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences...” (p.122). Furthermore, both recognize that “socially constructed” race and racism, are central features of life in North America and that it significantly impacts the lives of people of colour (Solórzano, 1998; Savas, 2013).

Crenshaw (1995) added that race and racism “draw attention to the ways a system of racism operates to marginalize people of colour in a context supported by discriminatory policies and practices, and to the challenges presented by liberal ideas of objectivity, neutrality, color-blindness and meritocracy.”

Savas (2013, p.508) points out that race has real and important consequences in our society and significantly affects the life chances of people of colour. Savas also stated that “this racialized social structure still seems to favor whites, as it was in the past, and people of color in comparison with whites do not have equal access to better education, jobs, of health services.”

White hegemony, according to Bonilla-Silva (1997), has resulted in unequal life-chances between whites and non-whites, and, as an inevitable result, non-whites’ learning opportunities are significantly fewer than whites, and eventually, a racialized social order is distinguished by this difference in life-chances (p.470).

Aguirre (2000, cited in Savas, 2013, p.511) points out that CRT stories, that expose and critique the dominant (male, White, heterosexual) ideology, which perpetuates racial stereotypes, are crucial social experiences that place the minority and their voice into the center, rather than the periphery. Solórzano (p.122) further elaborated by stating that the experiential knowledge of people of colour is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education, and it [CRT] can provide a method for which a persons’ lived experience can be expressed.

As Savas (p.510) pointed out “scholars using CRT argue that white was the standard and everything else had to be integrated with it.” Although Brown vs. Board of Education in the USA provided the opportunity “in theory” for all students to receive a standard education through desegregated schools, the ruling was not robust enough to impact the rigid education system that

was very skillful in maintaining the “White standard.” The “White standard” Savas talked about came in the form of integration into already existing predominantly White schools PWI, the closure of many Black schools and the loss of valuable jobs/career within the Black community. Savas (p. 514) pointed out that Black students in higher education are not automatically exempted from the inequities in the education system. Karen (2002, cited in Savas p.154) and Nettles and Perna (1997, cited in Savas p.154), point out that, “students of color have been incorporated into the lower tiers of the hierarchy of universities and have been under-represented in the higher education system.”

The motivation for using CRT as a framework is, therefore, to provide opportunities to analyze my data through the lenses of race and racism.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework for my thesis through the lenses of Africentricity and Critical Race Theory. I present *Africentricity* as the overarching theoretical framework from the perspective of researchers such as Asante (1980, 1991, 2014), Woodson (1933), Mkabela (2005), who discussed how Africentricity brings to the forefront, in every situation, the centrality of the African person.

I point out that a fundamental aim of Africentricity is that all cultural centers must be respected. And I argue that an Africentric approach seeks in every situation to appropriate centrality of the African person; it directly addresses the need for an African/Black person to be the ‘agent’ of their cultural experiences, to author their stories and to see the world through their own eyes. I then explained that without “agency” Black students are isolated and are faced with gaps in the educational system that keeps them at a disadvantage. As a step towards alleviating this problem, I called for urgent changes to the curriculum for one that reflects the identity of Black students and for the hiring of Black faculty that would provide an African perspective in the classroom.

With Africentricity, I also present *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) from the perspective of Ladson-Billings (1998), as a useful tool for explaining the relevance of race in education. Using CRT, I argue that race plays an important role in the learning experience of Black students. I also point out that “socially constructed” race and racism, are central features of life in North America and that it significantly impacts the lives of people of colour.

In chapter five, I capture the voices of the participants from the one-to-one interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE – RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter captures the voices of the participants from the one to one interviews and the focus group. I present the participants' voices from the one to one interviews and the focus group interview. For the one to one interviews, I used pseudonyms selected from African Baby Names¹⁹, which also provided the meaning of each name. For the focus interview, I used two letters from participants' geographic location plus the number that were assigned, for example, CA1- Canadian student #1, AF1- African student #1 and CB1- Caribbean student #1. These were used as an extra measure to protect the identity of participants.

The participants were asked to reflect on their learning experiences before studying at MSVU, their current experiences, and their future career goals. Participants were also asked to discuss their cross-cultural experiences with faculty, staff, and peers, and how they perceived these impacted their learning experiences. Additionally, participants shared the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed to maneuver the academy to remain academically successful at MSVU.

After collecting the data, it was later transcribed, and the one-to-one interviews were coded and analyzed for recurring themes and patterns in participants' response using MAXQDA. According to its website, MAXQDA²⁰ is one of the most widely used programs in qualitative and mixed method research. I used this software because it provided the ability to analyze the themes, which were the common narratives from each participant. These themes were used to analyze the data. I then examine the themes in light of the existing literature and explored new areas.

¹⁹ <http://babynames.net/all/african> - website used to provide pseudonyms for participants.

²⁰ <https://www.maxqda.com/what-is-maxqda> - software used to analyze the one to one interviews

To examine the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU, I drew on the narratives from their perspective as Black students at a PWI. I present the following major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data:

1. Alienation – Black students feeling excluded from the activities and curriculum at the university.
2. Racism – instances of racial discrimination and racial inequity experienced by participants.
3. Support systems – Where Black students get support while enrolled at MSVU.
4. Identity – how Black students manage identity, what steps they take to ensure their cultural identity and self-identity are maintained.

The Research Participants

Before sharing the participants' perspectives, I remind the reader of the research participants. In total, ten (10) individuals participated in the study [four (4) from Africa, three(3) from Canada and three (3) from the Caribbean and Bermuda]. All names used are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the study participants.

The 4 participants from Africa are: Efua, Nubia, and Amaka – all female participants who were enrolled in a Master's Degree at MSVU. Berko was the only male and undergraduate participant in this category. The participants all received at least their secondary school education before coming to study at MSVU.

The 3 participants from Canada are: Aster, the only Master's degree participant in this category. The presence of the ASG encouraged Aster to return to the Institution after being absent for a few decades. Naak is an undergraduate student who transferred from another local university. After completing her first undergraduate degree, she took a brief break from her academic career before joining MSVU. Abioye is an undergraduate student and the only male in this category.

After completing his studies at a local high school, Abioye took a break from studies for one semester before embarking on his studies at MSVU.

The 3 participants from the Caribbean are: Ife, the only Master's degree participant. She recently joined MSVU and the ASG. Nuru is the only male participant from this group and is a third-year student at MSVU. Imani is in her final year of studies at MSVU. Both Nuru and Imani are undergraduate participants.

Research Themes

Alienation

Of all the themes and sub-themes gleaned from the analysis of the data for this thesis, alienation was the most common among research participants. Of the three groups, the Canadian participants were affected the most by feelings of alienation. The analysis shows that participants who identified multiple sources of supports were as equally likely to feel alienated on campus as those who reported one or two sources of support.

So what is alienation? Mau, (1992) explained alienation to be a vague presence of social estrangement, "an absence of social support or meaningful social connection,"(p.739).

Bronfenbrenner, (1986) says it is a "lack a sense of belonging," (p.430). In an alienating university student may feel cut off from their professors, classmates, or the university community. Brown et al., (2003) adds that "alienation can have adverse effects on young people and lead to a sense of disconnectedness from school" (p.227). Mau, (1992) found that within the school context, alienation is often related to negative student behaviors such as self-isolation, failure, absenteeism, and dropping out (p.739).

The African Participants

Although I support Mau's (1992) explanation for alienation, the narratives show that there are factors, such as the ASG and other external support systems, that provided a foundation avert

some of the negative behaviours mentioned above. However, some participants said they experienced the feelings of *monachopsis*²¹ throughout their studies. This was evident when Amaka responded with the following when I asked about her ability to remain focused:

So, if I want to excel in what I do, when I go to class I listen, I looked beyond many things, irrespective of how uncomfortable I might be, because I'm the only Black student in the class. I'm listening to the professor talk about her area of expertise, and I'm making my own version of it in my mind. And there were times where it was difficult because I could not hold some words, or I could not relate to some examples; I just didn't feel like I'm in the right place because it just felt foreign, yeah, that's the word.

Amaka explained that her feelings of being out of place started when she met the MSVU welcoming team at the Halifax International Airport:

I did not enjoy the welcome, I would say, because it was still a lot of other people who were not like me, doing the welcoming. For example, the African students or student of African descent were still very few. There were a lot of Asian students, a lot of people from other places. I just felt I don't know why, but my experience in Halifax has always made me feel like a minority, wherever I go, it's obvious that you are a minority.

When asked about her relationship with professors, staff, and peers at MSVU, Amaka said,

... there were times that I felt foreign again, so although we are in this group [small group discussion in the classroom], everyone else understands the example that was discussed or a situation another participant discusses. This is how we do it, or we can do it this way.

However, I am of a different view, and I'm the only person who is thinking that way,

²¹ The subtle but persistent feeling of being out of place, as mal-adapted to your surroundings. Definition by Urban Dictionary

so... there were times that I've had to, many times I have had to compromise on how I think things should be done, on how things should be presented.

Compromising, according to Amaka, does not mean that she would share her thoughts and other times accept another viewpoint. In fact, it meant that she had to choose when to contribute to the discussion knowing that her views weren't considered in the end. This lack of meaningful connection with peers not only hampered the flow of knowledge but also excluded Amaka's valuable contributions.

When asked to discuss her experience with staff, Amaka quickly selects the Financial Services Office as an example. She remembered a negative experience when a staff acted inappropriately towards her, and she said "this memory will stay with me forever." The memory of this experience also caused her to become emotional as she thought about the action of the staff. She spoke about the lack of information available to Black students, and how that affected her ability to always have her fees paid in full by the deadline.

Unlike the negative experiences Amaka had with both peers and staff, she found her relationship with faculty members within her department to be more fulfilling. She recalled having two faculty members in her department who paid particular attention to her, and reckon that this is because they had similar experiences when they were as international students themselves in the past, and were able to relate to her circumstances.

Nubia shared some similar experiences as Amaka. She also reminisced about the support she received from at least one faculty member in her department but confessed that the faculty member is a visible minority and was able to relate to her circumstances. When Nubia was asked to describe her initial learning experience at MSVU, she said:

I kind of struggled a lot, with school, getting access to information on some specific things, for example, writing my papers, and so on... (laugh) it was like, you know when a fish is out of the water? Alternatively, like you are being thrown into the middle of the ocean.

Dean, (1961, cited in Brown 2003, p.228) states “individuals who feel powerless see themselves as having no control over events in their life.” For Nubia, alienation led to many episodes of isolation and self-blaming. When further describing her initial experiences at MSVU, Nubia said,

I felt lonely; it was difficult for me to make friends. You know, there is this kind of clique in school where everyone knows... the Asian students are all together; some Caribbean students are forming their own clique, so it was very lonely for me. That made me really missed home. I was like, maybe I should've stayed home. However, at that point, I realized that I had to grow up.

In Amaka's case, she states, “I think I got too tired of trying to make people understand me, so it got to a point now, just right..., okay..., they will figure it out.”

Relying on the memory of their previous learning experiences at postsecondary institutions in Africa, all of the participants from the African group of students expressed their disappointment in the institution for not helping them feel that they belong. However, none of these participants made any formal complaints to the university. This is in keeping with Dean's, (1961, cited in Brown 2003) understanding of feeling powerless; she mentioned that these students would be heard saying, “rules are set, and I don't have much choice” (p. 228). Although the participants from this grouping didn't explicitly confess feeling powerless, it was evident that they preferred to avoid confrontation or being put in the spotlight.

To understand the role MSVU plays in alienating Black students I refer to the systemic approach and the overt approach. These participants spent a considerable amount of effort to describe their experiences of alienation from an overt approach. This has led Amaka to remind the university that:

I didn't just come to school to come and learn science, I came to school to learn science, and also to live with human beings. Therefore, I should be in comfortable surroundings to thrive and be able to say 'hello, how are you today?' to my fellow human beings. So, I think that it's obvious when you come to campus just seeing students around, it's obvious that a group of students are very comfortable while another group is surviving, like literally survival of the fittest. I might see that, okay... the others... the White students might feel more comfortable because this is their home country, which makes sense, but whichever culture I come in here with, I should not be looked at in a different way, 'oh, she's different.'

Nubia shares this belief when she states,

There needs to be diversity. I mean, you put it on your website that this school is diverse. It's not only the students that need to be diverse, but the faculty as well needs to be diverse. We need Black professionals; we need people of different races and... you know, it's not compulsory that they must be only Black, but someone of the different racial minority in the faculty.

Efua expressed similar a sentiment in her description of her learning experiences at MSVU. In describing her initial experience, she said, "that [not able to contribute in class] made me feel a bit left out." She later mentioned that her experience was like, "you're a stranger but just walk on eggshells and be fine! I'm here to support you, but only to a certain extent." The notion of being

in a place where participants experienced transformation from being active subjects to an object of the social process caused these participants [Efua, Nubia, and Amaka] to become emotional, as they considered the experiences of their undergraduate degree in Africa.

This feeling of powerlessness, despite being told you are free [to think, to learn, to explore knowledge] has led Efua to declare, “to be honest, I feel like getting out of MSVU, or just getting out of the classroom setting was what helped me.”

Unlike Amaka and Nubia, Efua did not have positive experiences with faculty members, White students or staff. She declares that “The professors were just at arm’s length... and always... It was just... No, I didn’t have any close relationship with the staff because I didn’t feel like they were interested in that.” Within the class setting, Efua stated:

As an international student you kind of feel left out most of the time when professors say, just put yourself into groups and, there are little groups of people that are all white students together, all Asian students together, so it’s now left to the Black girl, and yeah, the only Black person....

She later stated, “I had almost 0% interaction, relationship with Caucasian students in my classes.”

It is worth noting that these three graduate student participants were enrolled in different programs, and represented two African countries. In spite of this, the narrative showed significant similarities among these participants.

In analyzing the experiences of Berko, I noticed that he presented his experiences from a position of less experience in the academy, but was still able to draw from his high school experiences in Canada, which reflected similar experiences faced by the graduate students in this grouping. One notable difference is that Berko was never the only Black student in his class, while the other

participants expressed that they don't ever remember having another Black student in their class. Berko talked about feeling out of place based on cultural differences and language, both inside and out of the classroom but he was always quick to share examples of how he dealt with the situation. For example, he mentioned that he had some difficulty adapting to the Canadian culture, yet he went on to share:

... my supervisor that I had a few months back at the university expected some kind of results and some kind of feedback from me that I wasn't able to give, so that was a challenge for me. Trying to know what she wanted and trying to get the results or the help to get the results that she wanted was difficult. What I did, or what I'm doing right now to work on that is... I have friends who are from different parts of the world; I tried to learn from them and find out what they actually mean when they say something. That's one of the things that I'm doing right now.

Berko claimed his overall experience at MSVU is good, compared to his high school experience in Africa. However, he finds it difficult to express his feelings at times, especially to someone who does not share his cultural experiences. He will often ignore university invitations to attend or participate in activities if they do not reflect his culture.

Like Berko, many participants did not see their education as a tool to advance their community [Black community], but rather a hindrance to social reengagement. Participants were asked to talk about how their degree would benefit their community after graduation. Some participants haven't considered returning to their community, and they provided a hypothetical answer. For example, "if I was to return and if I go back..."

Woodson, (1933, p.57) states that those who should help their community have abandoned the undeveloped 'Negro.' He states that "the educated White man differs from the educated 'Negro'

who so readily forsake the belated elements of his race....the 'Negro' forgets the delinquents of his race and goes his way to feather his own nest." A powerful message to Black academics. I embrace Woodson's explanation for the lack of development in the Black community. He also identifies this as a cause and effect of alienation, to Black academics. The cause - many educated Blacks who come from a Black community, lack the physical infrastructure to support a career in their community. As such, they tend to move to an urban setting, distancing themselves from their community and support system. The effect - Woodson found that the educated Blacks, now equipped with their knowledge, see their community a hindrance to their success, and as such, they take their skills elsewhere (p.56).

Participants were then asked to envision themselves returning to their community after graduation and to talk about how their degree has prepared them to function as a contributing member of their community. By asking this question, I wanted to find out what the participants' perception of the curriculum is, and whether it has prepared them for reintegrating into the societies they came from.

Berko: yes, it definitely does [prepare him for reintegration in his community] I am in my second going on the third year, and I can say that should I go back to my country right now, I would be able to manage an industry or a part an organization or a human resource part of an organization. I would be able to manage that because of the way I've been prepared here, because of the kind of education, or the kind of training I've had here. It has really prepared me for the real world.

Amaka: I'm sure if I get back to my home country right now I am going to merge in perfect, I'm going to be perfectly qualified, but I've also learned more about dealing with different cultures and all of that, which is a very great thing I'm very proud of. So, the

things I've learned here, they might not fit in perfectly at home because of the two cultures are different. However, the fact that I've lived there, it added to my experiences, and so both sides of the knowledge can be merged and adapted to my community, so... yeah. It has to be worth it, the money has to be worth it.

Both Berko and Amaka talked about the value of an international degree to their community, and although there are some significant differences in the degrees, for example, graduate and undergraduate, professional and non-professional and thesis and non-thesis, they were equally confident that reintegration would positively impact their communities. Amaka provided additional information to show that although her degree would benefit her community, the non-academic experiences she gained while studying at MSVU would be equally beneficial to her community.

Nubia's approach to answering this question was somewhat different from that of Berko and Amaka. She identified that the course content did not reflect her Black identity. Drawing on feminist theory, Nubia pointed out that the course content was heavily influenced by western theories and is therefore not applicable to her community. She said,

Nubia: ... my social issues are different; I'm not struggling to get equal pay with my fellow Black man because he doesn't have the same level of pay as the white man, you understand?... I'm a marginalized person; ... we've been oppressed all our lives. Racism, colonialism, all those things, so, we really don't identify with the things feminism is all about. If only they [the university] would understand that our issues are different. It [the degree] prepared me on a personal level... do you understand?... it made me aware of myself, now wanting to be visible, ... it has helped me, you know to grow as a person. What I've learned here [at MSVU],...but, I'm not sure whatever I've learned will impact

my society back home. It can only..., maybe it will impact here [Canada], if I stay here [in Canada], but not back home. Because people are struggling with poverty back home, people are struggling with (lack of) work; there is a recession, we have bad leaders, who were not building good infrastructures. They [people back home] don't identify..., yeah the issues are different, so they [people back home] don't identify with these things.

During the interview, I observed that Nubia answered this question in a tone which indicates she is frustrated about being excluded from the course content. Her answer also indicated that she thought about the applicability of her degree to her community.

Similarly, Efua states that her degree would not fulfill the needs of her community, because it lacks an African perspective. She recommends that the university consider providing a more inclusive curriculum.

Efua: Most of the classes I've had [at MSVU], most of the case studies were all North American case studies, and Africans are definitely a different public. What applies here, would not even fly [work]. No, it wouldn't work, for public relations, it's all about the audience... it's all about the public. So, I do feel like they [the university] could have been more diverse with the case study that we had.

Many international student participants expressed that most local companies would quickly hire someone with an international degree as opposed to someone with a degree from a local university. As seen above, although these participants are highly employable, the education they receive from MSVU does not necessarily equip them with the skills to culturally reintegrate into their community. Rafalides & Hoy, (1971, cited in Brown, 2003) described this as meaninglessness and states that "Individuals who experience meaninglessness do not have the ability to predict outcomes" (p.228).

Meaninglessness for students means that they lack an understanding of the school activities in which they are engaged, which leaves them unsure of how the school will contribute in a positive way to their future (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971, cited in Brown, p.228).

For this reason, some participants who are about to graduate said that their programs didn't help in preparing them to reintegrate into their community; this problem was compounded by a lack of Black faculty and staff representation across campus, whose presence on campus could motivate Black students.

The Caribbean Participants

This group comprised of three participants, two females and one male. Nuru- (male) and Imani- (female) are undergraduate students, while Ife (female) is enrolled in a Master's degree. Both Imani and Nuru reside on campus while Ife lives off campus.

Like the African participants, the Caribbean participants all declared that their initial learning experience at MSVU was tough. For example, Nuru states that

it was kind of rough actually, because, when you're in high school, your parents are always on you, 'make sure you get your homework done' and you have some time for sport or whatever activities you might have. But here, it's all on you. It's like you never get anything done when you're just on your own the entire time.

Ife described her initial experience: "I felt really lost here because I was new, I knew no one. I have no family in Halifax, and it's a bit of a challenge when you leave your comfort zone to come somewhere where you don't really know anyone."

Although Imani had a brother at MSVU to support her while in Halifax, her story about her initial experiences at MSVU were no different from the other participants. She stated that her first semester at MSVU was "pretty much a big culture shock and I had to deal with that."

The Caribbean participants were less likely to explicitly state that they feel “powerless” when talking about their learning experiences at MSVU. Participants were more likely to compare their situation to someone else or another time in their lives when it was worse.

For example, Imani mentioned the following when asked to provide an overview of her experience at MSVU:

I have not encountered a lot of it issues that I would find some of my other friends in different parts of the world would encounter, so I feel as if Canada is a pretty comfortable place for me. I felt like the learning experience itself was pretty good, I just wish there was more diversity in school programs, and with teachers [faculty], and societies and stuff around here... that could be much, much better.

Ife relies on the strong relationships her department (Department of Education) has with the Ministry of Education in her country and equates, the White faculty members that visited her home country, to having a Black professor when she stated the following:

...you would be excited to see a black professor lecturing to you, but I have come across some professors who have been in my country, who have participated in programs... are in training programs in my country. My faculty advisor has been there, and another professor that I’m doing a course with currently, they have been there...

Although Ife did not claim to have formed personal relationships with these faculty members, for her, it was comforting to know that some faculty members from her department have established relationships with her country and understands her needs. Guiffrida (2006) found that strong relationships with faculty are crucial to student success at college and that “faculty, and family members, are necessary to support the intrinsic motivation of these college students” (p.459).

One common thread amongst all participants is the lack of Black professors. This factor affected the African and Caribbean participants more than it did the Canadian participants because they all came from countries that were predominantly Black and they had had Black teachers in school.

All three Caribbean participants spoke about their experience in a tone, which suggests they want to learn in a classroom that was instructed by a Black faculty. To find out if these participants were really affected by the lack of Black instructors in the classroom, I asked these participants to reflect on their previous learning experiences and to describe some differences between that and their current experiences.

Ife: ...when I was at Northern Caribbean University (NCU), I have professors from different parts of the Caribbean, for example, Cuba and other places, and they were all Black, ...and it was mostly Black students.

Ife stated that all of her professors were Black, this was proportionately matched with the student population, according to the last part of her answer. This statistic was similar to the other participants, for example,

Imani: My country is predominantly Black, and every teacher I've ever had was Black, every college professor I had was Black... I have never had a Black professor at this school [MSVU]. I never had, apart from you (as the ASG Coordinator), I really never saw anyone of colour, really in any prominent position where I can be like, okay! I can probably talk to them, and they would ultimately understand where I'm coming from if there was an issue.

Imani's comparison was extended to staff, from which she described the overall lack of representation as an issue. When Nuru was asked the same question, he provided the following:

Nuru: No!

Meaning that he had never been instructed by a Black faculty at MSVU. Furthermore, Nuru extended his answer to talk about his overall experiences in the classroom by stating that overall, his personal experiences with MSVU faculty were

... [they] don't really care what happens with your grade, while some of them do, don't get me wrong, but some of them are just like, you're responsible. Even though they say, you can come and see me anytime; it [the offer to visit a professors' office] still doesn't feel that they're genuine about that. It is still kind of like, even though I'm telling you that you can come and see me at any time I don't actually want you to come and see me at any time because I have research to get done.

Compared to his high school learning experiences, which was engaging, Nuru felt disconnected from his White professors at MSVU. Overall, the participants from the Caribbean thought that not having visible minorities representation in critical areas, such as faculty and administration, has affected their learning experiences at MSVU.

The Canadian Participants

I assumed that the Canadian participants would not experience alienation to the same extent as the African and Caribbean participants because of the support systems available to them in their communities. However, this group of students expressed in more detail how their learning experience was affected by alienation.

Aster and Naak, both female participants, had previous learning experiences at the post-secondary level in Canada before enrolling at MSVU. Aster, the graduate participant in this category, also brings multiple years of work experience in the education field. Abioye (undergraduate male participants), who attended MSVU after graduating from high school was

the only participant in this group that attended a high school with a significant Black student population.

When asked about their initial learning experiences at MSVU, participants said the following:

Abioye: my first year was pretty nerve-racking. I didn't know what was going on at first where I was going at the time, even though it's not a big school you can get lost pretty quickly. I found that when I was in my first-year, it was hard.

Aster: I came to the university perhaps quite naïvely assuming that this would be a, there would be space for edification, and found myself very quickly, because of other circumstances... they weren't just things that were happening within the classroom, but things that were happening on campus or in other parts of my life, where how things were dealt with that school actually exacerbated other issues.

As participants shared their experiences as a visible minority at their previous institution, they can now see that support was available, but just not to them. Abioye had a cultural support staff at his high school, and he assumed that he would receive more cultural support at university because of his high school experiences. When his university experiences did not match his expectations, Abioye felt a disconnect from his studies.

Naak said, "I guess I'm just used to being around White people. However, I'm not able to connect or relate to them, so I felt like an outsider in my classrooms.

Abioye states,

...in all the classes I've had in the first year, I did not see myself in any of the content.

However, I would think back to my high school, back in high school, I had a class, which actually made me felt like I was in the course content that we were discussing. But when I came to university my first year, all my classes, not so, not so much at all.

Aster concluded by stating that,

I look back to high school and [my] undergraduate [degree], I think, one of the reasons why I really wanted to attend graduate school was realizing that I've never actually received any form of mentorship... I did quite well in public school, I then went to university and for a variety of reasons kind of got lost in that sea. I had never really been given any kind of support at the elementary [school] level...[or the] secondary [school] level. I really hadn't received the kind of support that would let me know that I could expect to seek out mentorship at the university.

These participants all continued to feel marginalized and expressed a sense of powerlessness at the post-secondary level. For example, Amaka states that,

... everyone has great ideas irrespective of where he or she is coming from, but I find that the issue or the challenge is how to relay that great idea to this other person to make them understand, like how to communicate it with them... so this [inability to communicate like a Canadian student] reflects in our assignments, in our contributions in class, we might actually understand what is going on, or have a great idea about the question being asked but the challenge is how to relate it with respect.

She later described the issue of not being able to communicate simply because of her accent.

Imani and Berko, who had a similar experience with using the 'wrong' accent, also shared Amaka's frustration with being judged on their accents.

Like the other participants, the Canadian participants expressed feeling alienated from the course material, their faculty, staff and the university. Additionally, one participant from this group expressed feeling alienated from a Black group/society on campus. Naak states:

I joined a specific group/society, and... they assured me that it was not just only for people from their community, it was for everybody. However, I was, in fact, the only person not from that community that came to the meeting. Apart from me, maybe only one other student, but his parents were from that community. I did not really relate to them that well.

The Impact of Alienation on Research Participants

Alienation is not a new topic to researchers. In fact, our post-secondary institutions spend millions of dollars each year trying to understand the needs of minorities and to become more inclusive. In spending more money to become inclusive, these institutions have forgotten to listen to those most affected. For example, MSVU has committed to inclusion yet has never done any extensive studies to understand the needs of Black students. The limited research completed by Black students and faculty at MSVU, Kennedy (2012) and Headley (2014) and Brigham (2007), that provided answers about Black students' learning experiences at MSVU, continue to be overlooked.

As mentioned at the beginning, many participants seemed to be more aware of spaces that they are not invited and tend to gravitate to the more welcoming spaces. For example, Aster states, "my mother always say, go where you're invited," to bring awareness of these uninviting spaces and to avoid the effects of alienation.

It appears that what participants want is for the university to address the void of Black people, cultures, histories, and experiences in the curriculum, and to address the glaring lack of Black faculty members in all departments and lack of Black people in leadership roles in the university. Brown (2003), concluded that "one hypothesis holds that, with our increasingly diverse society, students who are somehow different (e.g., students with disabilities, students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, students from economically depressed backgrounds) are not buying

into the value of schools and the educational process because schools do not represent who they are or their lives” (p.228).

Support Systems

Participants described supports they received while enrolled at MSVU. Apart from the ASG, most participants received support from their family and the local community. A few participants also acknowledged that a faculty member was supportive and contributed in one way or another to their success. However, almost all of the participants reported that the ASG had a significant impact on their learning experience at MSVU.

Most participants sought academic support on campus including from the ASG, as well as non-academic supports through the ASG and off-campus entities.

This kind of support is why Aster remained at MSVU. She stated

...I had a conversation with the Dean of the faculty as well [as a faculty member], just that sort of conversation that somebody is saying, ‘Okay, you come from a kind of non-traditional background, but you sound like you’re somebody really who should be here.’ And then again, hearing that from that professor, then after being here for a couple of weeks, I received an email from the Africentric Support Group.

With regards to faculty support, Aster stated, “In any of the classes that I took, the faculty immediately took an interest in me as a student and in supporting my learning journey.”

As mentioned earlier, most participants credited the support they received from the ASG office for keeping them at MSVU and for creating a sense of stability in their lives at the academy.

When asked about how the ASG supported them, Aster states,

...if it was not for the ASG I wouldn’t have... I wouldn’t be at the Mount. I can honestly say that because of some of the barriers to education which I know I haven’t gotten into too many details because it might lead to me being too specific... my mother always told

me *'go where you were welcome.'* So, had it not been for the ASG I wouldn't be at the Mount because I didn't truly feel welcome at the Mount.

Aster continued,

... I was really thankful for the ASG because it was the one place, it was a corner to go to, sit down and go, *'okay.'* Just trying to sit down and take stock of what is going on, get some directions towards... I think I initially came to the office and met one-on-one [with the ASG Coordinator]. Then, because the office had an open-door policy, I think students tend to gravitate towards there. Sometimes I really enjoy being able to go to space and work.

She concluded by stating the following,

I would say that the ASG, I know it's difficult to imagine that somebody is interested in your success, but the ASG is. You know, we are always surrounded by the media that tells us that we shouldn't trust each other, that we shouldn't even trust ourselves, and that we don't have anything to contribute, we have nothing to say, we're surrounded by all these negative messages. And the ASG, you walk in, and you can feel it... you can just feel it, like; it's a safe place to be. So if you want to go there and not really talk to anybody, you don't have to. Sometimes you just need to space just to clear your head and noticed when you just come to see the people aren't looking at you I'm shying away from you or following you around. It's just somewhere where you can just sit quietly and work or to sit quietly and eat your lunch if that's what you want to do. Or just have somebody actually look at, immediately smile at to you and greet you, not look at you with disdain and skepticism and decided whether or not, you know... through gritted teeth and pursed lips, ask you, *'can I help you?'* while looking to you.

Similarly, Abioye shared,

I think it pushes me out there especially getting ready for presentation, which is really huge in university because there are many presentations, a lot of group work and I think that the ASG just got me set to do better...in class. And also, even outside of school it would really help me a lot in the community.

Within the MSVU community, Abioye confessed that he didn't have much contact with faculty members. In fact, when he thinks of academic support, he tended to reflect on his high school experiences and shared the following example:

I struggled with math, and a lot of the calculation and all that. Back in high school, I wasn't great at it, but I started picking up the pace, and I started actually understanding it. So I was feeling really great about that. So when I came to university, I was hoping that I would still have that knowledge, and be able to just, like, fly through it, but I found I was struggling a lot with mathematics, and I had accounting and microeconomics, and those were concentrated in math, I was struggling a lot without the needed support.

According to Guiffrida (2006, p.701), strong relationships with faculty are crucial to student success at college. Yet, almost all of the participants had minimal connection with faculty members. Despite the minimal connection, Abioye states, "I have had pretty good professors, and my classes are going well... and also interacting with professors has been beneficial."

Naak also had a positive experience with faculty support. She shares:

I had to drop a course, and the professor was very supportive and try to help me figure out if I could pass the course or alternatively if I need to drop it. Moreover, she gave me advice on how to retake it and what steps to take after that because there is a prerequisite for another course.

However, when it came to their academic work, these participants were less likely to approach a faculty member and were more likely to feel isolated.

In contrast, participants from Africa were more likely to receive faculty support. Nubia's narrative shows that at least three faculty members went beyond academic support to help, as reported by Nubia, who states:

I had a good rapport with all my professors. Maybe I was just lucky to have had good professors during my time. They helped me a lot. Especially with assignments, when they saw I was struggling, they would say, ok, meet this person to help you with your writing, go to the writing center and do all that.

Similarly, Amaka talked about her unique experience when one of her professors went beyond what was allowed to accommodate her. This example shows that the faculty skillfully intervened and acted as a mentor at the right time. Amaka shared:

During the time I was going through the challenge with the staff at the financial services office, this other professor was reasonably open about discussing my situation, and she told me that I could come into the class and learn because she knows me and that she knows that I'm not going to run away and not pay tuition.

However, unlike the Canadian participants, the participants from Africa relied on the financial support of families back in Africa, and for this reason, the African participants were more likely to interact with university staff for financial guidance and for information about the availability of scholarships and bursaries.

These participants were more actively involved in the ASG and used words such as "home and family" to describe their connection to the office. For example:

Efua: I found that the ASG provided me with that *stability*. Knowing that there's somebody you can go to..., There's a group that you can just go to and *feel at home*, that made me, you know..., that put me at rest. And so I was able to Focus on my academics as well. And ASG also provides services to help you, for example reviewing your papers, discussing papers and things like that. So that is definitely was beneficial for me.

She adds,

... I mentored several students, who I still mentor to date, because I now *see them as family* and not just students, and so I made sure that they volunteered with the ASG so that they could improve their skills in that capacity and manner. (Efua)

Amaka: ...I was involved because it was my only place on campus that *felt like home*. So, yeah, you help at home, you do things at home, right? So, I think I got that from the other students because they also felt comfortable with me around.

Like all of the other participants, Nubia struggled at first to integrate into the MSVU community. After joining the ASG, she became actively involved in on-campus activities. Nubia's connection with the ASG was different from the other participants. Although she knew of the ASG, she did not know what it's mandate was, and as such, she did not really find out about the ASG until her second semester. Although she was disappointed about the poor promotion of this group, she was happy to receive enough information to know that she should join.

When asked about who could benefit from the ASG, Nubia says:

students of colour, because if we have any issues we come to you [the ASG Coordinator], and we are able to interact with other students of colour. And then we create the group where we can do... collaborate and do things for Black students, represent them... you

know... in class, in the faculty, in an area, they need help with. The ASG has really been a help to me, most times when I'm struggling with something, I always come to the ASG's Office, or come to your office for help. I need to find out information about this... I need to know about that. And then you break it down for me, so you make it so easy for me to be able to do things... you know. So, the ASG has really been of great help to me, it really helped me.

Like the other participants, the Caribbean participants were introduced to the ASG by email. Although Imani eventually received the introductory email, her brother, an MSVU student at the time, first introduced her to the ASG. These participants shared the following:

Ife: well, basically I got an email from someone whose name was Randy... I remember when I was completing my form for the bursary, Randy really showed me how to do the form, I didn't understand how it was done, but I saw him in the library, and I consulted with him, and I was able to complete my form, and I did it correctly.

Nuru: I received an email, well, within my first week of being a student here.

Imani: My brother informed me about the Africentric Support Group; he was the one who told me about it. He was like, the guy in charge, he reaches out to you through email and everything once you become a student. So, I knew about that.

Surprisingly, although participants were aware of the services offered through the ASG, they were, like the Canadian students, less likely to be as involved. Participants were comfortable in knowing that the group was available to them and that they can access it when they desire, declared by two participants in this category:

Nuru: I felt the ASG was just kind of like a support group that if I need anything, like if I needed to talk about something, it was just a community where you would feel safe at all times.

Imani: I just always knew that, okay, if I needed to ask someone a specific question or meet with a person like me, if I wanted to apply for a student loan or something like that, I could ask someone in this group. They've been through the same process, they did this, they did that. As an international student, you can't get a loan, but you can look at this website or whatever, for a scholarship or like any kind of bursary or financial award. I felt like the ASG just gives me heads up on a lot of events that were happening. So, if something was happening at school, like if I read the email and I was like, oh yeah, I forgot that they sent me an email about this, they sent me an email about that. I can go to this event, I can go to that event..., as opposed to a lot of the regular school emails.

Recapping Student Support

The data shows that the participants of this study were all interested in receiving support that contributed to their learning experiences at MSVU. It also shows that graduate student participants were more likely to develop relationships with faculty members, which according to Guiffraida (2006), are crucial to student success at college. Pointing to research (Arnold, 1993; Eimers & Pike, 1996; Flemming, 1984; Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; Nettles, 1991; Schwitzer, Griffen, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999), Guiffraida 2006, found that although a faculty/student relationship is crucial to student success, "Black students are often unable to form strong relationships with White faculty at PWIs, because, "Black students often perceive White faculty as culturally insensitive. (P.465)

Although Guiffraida's (2006) finding might be accurate for most students, my findings show that some participants were willing to find common grounds with their faculty. For example, Ife

shared that faculty members from her department would often visit her country to teach. The perception that faculty members understood her culture and academic needs comforted her. Similarly, when Amaka was experiencing financial difficulties, her professor assisted. On the other hand, Aster discussed her experience and observation of missed opportunities and insensitive re/actions by faculty members that let a teaching and learning moment slip by. None of the participants at the undergraduate level spoke about developing faculty/student relationships. However, most of them talked about using the ASG for support. For example, Naak states, “they [the ASG] have been supportive. I don’t know how to describe it; there’s a level of comfort like there’s something there [in the ASG].” In addition, although all of the participants were aware of the ASG on campus, the Caribbean participants were less likely to access the group.

Racism

Racism, according to Lee (1996) is “the use of institutional power to deny or grant people and groups of people rights, respect, representation, and resources based on their skin colour” (p. 27).

Jones (1997, cited in Paul 2012, p. 10) discussed several forms of racism:

- Individual racism - with this form of racism, individuals are likely to experience racial discrimination on a personal level.
- Institutional racism - experienced as a result of social and institutional policies that exclude those affected from participation in society.
- Cultural racism – which occurs when the cultural practices of the ‘dominant’ group are generally regarded by society and its institutions as being superior to the culture of a ‘subordinate’ group.

Another type of racism proposed by Trepagnier, (1996, cited in Paul, 2012) is silent racism and is described as racism performed by people “who by all accounts, would classify themselves as

not racist” “In this form of racism, the dominant group holds negative beliefs and attitudes about the minority group but are only semi-aware of them” (p.11).

Although some participants explicitly stated that they'd experienced racism at MSVU, they were less likely to provide details of previous instances. In other situations, participants provided a brief description of racism but then explained strategies they've used to cope with the incident

Both female participants from the Caribbean stated that they personally experienced racism at MSVU. They shared the following:

Ife: Yes [I experienced racism]! However, once the person gets to know who I really am, then they take a different thought to what they were thinking about me. So yes, I have experienced some of that [racial discrimination], not on a broad scale, but yes I will get that experience.

Imani: I'm pretty blessed and pretty happy that I've never actually experienced an extreme situation of [racial] discrimination over here... like I haven't really had that, but... I feel for the most part; it's a university, it educated me and [that is] its' job. But, I just felt that it could've reached out a little bit more for my personal growth.

However, Nuru said, “No [I did not experience racism]. [But] I felt I was discriminated against in other ways,” when asked about his experiences with racism at MSVU.

Although the participants from this category claimed not to have experienced direct individual racism, Imani showed that she was aware of the other types of racism. For example, cultural racism,

In February, when it was Black History Month, I just felt like..., it was just a small little display they had in the library about a little bit of Black history stuff. And it's like, when they want to do pride week or something like that it would be a whole shebang

[extravagant display] inside of the library, a whole shebang in Seton, a whole shebang in Rosaria, they [the university] make them feel so comfortable, and it's just like, what happened to the people who are from different countries?

As mentioned earlier, almost all of the participants claimed to have been the only Black student in their class at one time or another and that none of them had been instructed by a Black professor at MSVU.

Although a White student may ask, "what's the fuss?," for the Black student it is the subtle dismantling of their identity and the cultural insensitivity they experience by some White professors, in the name of ignorance (Guiffraida, 2006). Berko shared:

... in my first-year, one of my courses I was taking [a course] that had to do with IT [information technology course], the prof. went ahead and asked me if I ever did IT in high school, back in high school. I was a bit surprised; I was shocked a bit, no offense not everybody knows that, so just go ahead and give an answer. So I just said, 'yes we do have IT classes, we do have computer labs, we do go to the labs, we do practical, we do this... oh, I've done some programming, by the way! 'So, I'm into computer programming, so... she was glad to know that, oh... we had those things back in Africa.

Nubia is of the same mindset, upon recognizing that Whiteness on campus is normalized she asked, "where are the Black professors?" She adds:

There needs to be diversity. I mean, you put it on your website that this school is diverse. It is not only the students that need to be diverse, but the faculty as well needs to be diverse. We need Black professionals; we need people of different races and... you know, it's not compulsory that they must be only Black, but someone of the different racial minority in the faculty. (Nubia)

Amaka described her situation with a staff member at MSVU once, and was very emotional because, as she put it “if this was back home it would have been handled differently.” After meeting at their [MSVU staff] office to discuss a temporary financial problem, Amaka was having. She shared:

... the person I met with literally told me, ‘Why did they [Canadian immigration] give you a visa if you didn’t have the money [to attend school]?’ In addition, they [MSVU staff] looked at my name, the English portion of my name, this person looked at me and said, ‘Who give you that name, it’s so old?’

While sharing this experience, Amaka became very emotional and was unable to talk further about this experience. She later stated that she will forever remember this experience and that every time she remembers the experience she gets emotional.

There is a connection between alienation and the potential for racism, as described by the participants from Africa.

Literature and media coverage show that African Nova Scotians have been discriminated against for hundreds of years. The BLAC Report (1994) highlights the plight of the African Nova Scotian person:

For almost two centuries, Black communities have demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the content, context and teaching styles of the curriculum of the public school system by actions ranging from the numerous petitions to lodging class action complaints with the Human Rights Commission. Parents and students have questioned the absence of a curriculum that is culturally relevant or reflective of their experiences. (p.40)

To say that African Nova Scotians are patient is an understatement, since participants in this grouping, for example, Berko, states, “I did not see myself in any of the [course] content.” Aster puts it nicely when she said,

...it’s not asking for special treatment; it’s just asking... because the institution says to students that are White skinned, by its very nature this [institution is] set up for those students to accommodate those students or student who come from a more traditional background, there are no supports here for students of African descent. I’m happy to see that more universities are providing support for the students of indigenous, for First Nations background in this country, but I hope that that outreach is very much... it’s actually authentic. I mean, I would like to see that same sort of welcoming and supports for students of African descent...

By identifying that there are other groups benefiting from the resources available to all students, Aster is drawing our attention to some of her needs. She points out below that there is a lack of knowledge about the needs of Black students or little interest in trying to help them:

...It was often ignorance, in terms of how to work with students of colour, how to work with Black students in particular. In addition, they were often references that were made in classroom discussions and in lectures that ..., you know... in many ways were quite offensive and I can’t say almost to a person... the intention wasn’t there. But, to be on the receiving end or sit next to somebody when it splatters, really it’s more about why I ended up having to do a lot of work around.

It is not entirely clear why the undergraduate students from this category did not discuss their experiences of racism, but one possibility might be desensitization of the issue surrounding racism. Another might be that they had not experienced any form of racism at MSVU.

Overall, this account shows that racism is real at MSVU, whether it is experienced personally, institutionally, culturally or silently. Although my expectations were that the African Canadian participants would provide more narrative on this topic, I was happy to know that the African participants were much more open to talking about their experiences of racism on campus.

Identity

Ritchey (2014) states that “Racism significantly impacts racial identity development...” (p.100).

As I explore my findings, I will attempt to find out if Ritchey’s findings hold true for the participants in my study. I will explore how Black students perceive their identity and how their identity influenced their learning experiences at MSVU.

College is where young adults begin to question their identity and explore the question of “who am I?” according to Magolda (2001, p.4). For many participants, especially those at the graduate level, their identity was closely linked to the ASG. Further explanation of this link will be discussed under the theoretical analysis.

Some of the participants said that they attended private schools, which neglected them of the opportunity to build a strong African identity. For example, Amaka shared that,

...I would say, quite, unfortunately, some [African] students prefer to study in these [Western universities], like other universities, in other countries, where, because of that mentality of, like...you want to be White people and all of that here.

Amaka is drawing our attention to the intense grip colonialism has on the African continent even today. She demonstrated that many Black students on the African continent would choose the identity of their past colonizers.

Despite being somewhat prepared to integrate into the western culture, Amaka described the challenges she faced with being identified as a “minority” when she shared the following:

“I don’t know why, but my experience in Halifax has always made me feel like a minority, wherever I go, it’s obvious that you are a minority.”

And,

“...but there were times that I felt foreign again...if I feel foreign, it becomes like a huge wall to go over.”

In her attempt to form an internal identity in Canada, Amaka encounter situations where some of her identities were cultivated while others were foisted on her, for example, “minority and foreign” as mentioned above. She is certainly African, but her cultural and religious identities was pushed aside to replace the new identities that resonate with our society. This was also evident when Amaka said,

...there were times that I’ve had conversations with, let's say other White students and they’re trying not to offend me, and I’m also trying to be open to them. Therefore, it makes it a very uncomfortable conversation. I am of the view that sometimes we ourselves make it very uncomfortable. I’m just a student as you are or you are a student as I am, we can talk on very common grounds, we can talk about ubiquitous things, and that is how you build relationships. If everyone is so cautious, it makes for a challenging conversation.

To construct a sense of what her identity should be while studying at MSVU, Amaka had to revisit norms such as lived experiences, foods, dialect and appearance [hair styles] and negotiate their applicability to her new environment. In this process, she also resisted those labels placed on her. She states,

‘I think I got too tired of trying to make people understand me, so I got to a point now, just right..., okay..., they will figure it out. Because, once you start talking not everyone is getting you, and it is obvious on faces...’ (Amaka)

Amaka further reflected on her cultural identity and how her learning is influenced by who she is when she states:

I think we are here and we are pumped with the Canadian culture, or the culture here, there should be room made for others to learn about other cultures and not be looked on as, uhm.... things that we are trying to tolerate here. I'm not here to be tolerated; I'm here because I want to be here, I choose to come here because I thought it was a good place that I would feel comfortable.

In looking at Nubia's comments, I found some notable similarities. Although there were other external influences, Nubia reckons that the ASG was a significant influence in forming her identity while studying at MSVU. She also states,

I met a lot of good people through the ASG. And, it has helped me with school, being able to get ahead especially with my writing and all that. The ASG has impacted me in a way where I've been able to interact with people of colour. And I know being a part of the ASG has helped make me aware of my identity, in a way.

Although the ASG was a major influence on Nubia's identity, it was one that she welcomed. Identifying with the ASG has given her the opportunity to create a reference point, while she focusses on her internal identity. She also stated that:

...[this] is part of why I really wanted to write [thesis research] on something that has to do with self-awareness? Realizing that you're a Black person, even if, maybe you are one of the other Black people in the classroom, that doesn't mean you can't make something

of yourself, you know. So, it has made me realize about... realize and make something out of my Black identity.

Nubia said that when she began her studies at MSVU, she felt isolated, but after joining the ASG, she, "...wanted to identify... to be visible as a Black person. So, I would say the ASG has made me want to identify as a Black person." She now feels rejuvenated and motivated to succeed after connecting with the ASG.

Both Efua and Berko shared a similar experience that helped in shaping their perception about MSVU. While reminiscing about why she chose to study at MSVU, Efua said that she was looking at the MSVU website at the time, and seeing the availability of support for Black students, she felt confident that this was the place for her. She continued by stating,

...[the ASG] was the only thing I saw that looked like... oh, okay my people are here.

Even the pictures on the [MSVU] website didn't show any diversity either. Even if it [the MSVU website] showed diversity, it wasn't with Black people. So seeing the Africentric Support Group, I'm like... Okay, I see Afri... Africentric that was it.

The ASG, according to Efua, was the place where she met people that looked like her and had a shared identity. The activities nurtured their shared experience and kept her and other Black students academically sound. One such activity, although for many, it might be insignificant, Efua recognized it as significant in developing her identity as a Black student on campus. She states:

I remember the jollof cook-off, Ghana jollof and Nigerian jollof that was an entertaining one for the students. So yes, I feel like more of these activities would definitely, you know..., continue to benefit the university and benefit students of African descent.

Although this might be classified as a “potluck” to many, for Efua and other participants it is an opportunity to reflect on some of their cultural norms through cuisine and games.

The Caribbean participants explained that although they all experienced, “culture shock” when they arrived at MSVU, they were still able to rely on the steady support of family. This support was, for example, news from home, emotional and financial support, and they helped in maintaining participants’ cultural identity.

Only one participant from this group talked about the lack of food she was accustomed to having back home as something to make her feel left out.

The participants in this group were also more likely to associate themselves with a Canadian friend but still prefer the support they receive from Black students. For example:

I had Canadian friends, but they didn’t make a significant impact on my life, not to sound rude or anything, but they just didn’t make a significant impact on my life. And I felt like the people who were from the Caribbean or from different African countries, made me feel more comfortable at the school as opposed to the Canadian students. Because I feel like, a lot of times they would just stick to their ways, and they wouldn’t be as open as it should.

These participants also compared their prior learning experiences to their MSVU learning experiences and found that they lacked any form of connection with their professors, the university, and fellow students. This has led Ife to say, “...when you see a fellow Black student on campus, it makes me feel really good...,” something she didn’t have to consider at her last institution.

As the Caribbean participants reflected on their prior learning experiences, they discussed that the shift from a Predominant Black Institution (PBI) to a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) had some effect on shaping their identity. For example, Imani shared that,

...at the College of the Bahamas, I was pretty involved with a lot of different groups, because I felt like..., Okay! They would have something that would attract me, Right? Moreover, coming from a place where most people look like me, or most people are from the same culture and have the same cultural values as me, has made me feel much more comfortable as opposed to over here.

And although Nuru wasn't always the only Black student in his classes, he said, "...I've never had a Black professor at MSVU..."

As mentioned earlier, Caribbean participants used the support of the ASG less often than the African participants, and were comfortable in knowing that the services were available whenever they needed it.

Canadian participants often spoke in the context of their Black or African identity as opposed to Canadian identity. These participants were already familiar with a lack of representation in their schools, whether in the classroom or in administration. These participants were also accustomed to being, "one of the only Black students" in their class. In Aster's case, she was one of two Black students in her school. These participants' schools were also located in Predominantly White school districts, as explained by Naak who described her school as, "...they were predominantly White people there, but there was a presence of the Black Community, yeah, a Black presence."

Participants in this group had a strong bond with their community and family, who provided support for them. In addition, although two of these participants had previously attended another post-secondary institution, the transition to MSVU was still seen as a challenge to overcome. Naak and Abioye both told stories about their isolation on the MSVU campus, and at times referenced the lack of support for African Nova Scotians on campus. For example, Naak states that:

“...being Black and continuously feeling kind of isolated, it was good to see and be around people that commonly deal with the issues I face, and that has familiarity with my issues.”

Participants in this group were less like to have taken high school courses that focused on their cultural identity. For example, Abioye shared the following:

...in all the classes I've had in the first year, I did not see myself in any of the content. However, I would think back to my high school, back in high school, I had a class which actually made me feel like I was in the [course] content that we were discussing, but when I came to university my first year, all my classes, not so [did not make me feel included], not so much at all...

When Naak was asked, “did you do any African studies or African Canadian studies at your previous University or MSVU?” she stated, “No! I do not know if it is offered through here, so I did not inquire. I just didn't bother, I guess, after high school.”

For Aster, reflecting on the lack of resources available to her during high school and consequently, her undergraduate studies were some of the reasons why she wanted to pursue graduate studies.

As was common in the narrative amongst the African participants, the Canadian participants at both the undergraduate and graduate levels drew on the ASG, while on campus, to help shape their identity as Black students at MSVU. For example, Aster said:

...even I, as somebody who just came along and entered into an idea that any time I suggested something, alright asks about something, I was never dismissed with the, 'well, that's not how we do things around here' or 'you don't have a right to contribute because you didn't actually start this thing [the ASG],' this is my thing, and you can go. Which is very much the western way of how we do things, which is very exclusionary. I find the ASG to be very inclusionary.

Chapter Summary

Overall, many participants struggled with feeling included at MSVU. Although there were not many cases of overt racial discrimination, Amaka's experience was enough to garner our attention to this issue.

Many participants discussed how they negotiated a new identity after joining MSVU. For example, Amaka struggled with the idea of being forced to select from a list of identities that didn't reflect who she was, and Efua who recognized that a strong connection to the ASG and the shared cultural experiences within the group, influenced their academic success. Codjoe (2006) support these participants' experiences by stating that,

The relationship between cultural identity and academic success for minority students is further supported by empirical evidence. For example, researchers at Harvard University found that Black immigrant from the Caribbean who identified with the heritage of their native land were most successful in school (pp.46-47).

Although this research did not investigate the correlation between identity and academic success, it drew my attention to how Black students choose their identity. For example, Black Canadians

identified as African Canadian and Black immigrants from African countries identified as African. In addition to this, participants were more likely to identify with the ASG and said that the ASG positively influenced their learning experiences at MSVU.

Although most participants complained about a lack of Black faculty, some employed strategies to compensate for faculty members' bias. For example, Amaka mentioned that she would often listen to her professor, but would often have to contextualize the lecture. Some of Ife's professors were involved in academic training in her country, so she felt a bit comforted. However, the lack of a Black presence among staff, students and faculty seemed to be an issue for most participants.

CHAPTER SIX – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss the narratives from the focus group interview, and connect these voices to the Africentricity and Critical Race Theory (CRT) – the theoretical frameworks for this thesis. This chapter will analyze the overall findings, while still keeping in mind that participants’ voices are integral to the process.

Theoretical Framework Analysis of Findings

Africentricity

As mentioned, this thesis is framed around the theories of Africentricity and Critical Race Theory (CRT). I use Africentricity to examine how Black students perceived the ASG and to provide a glimpse of how an Africentric Support Group can contribute to Black students’ learning experience at MSVU. In addition, I use CRT to examine how Black students’ learning experiences are affected by race.

Let me begin this section by reflecting on the question, which is also the title of her article, posed by Tatum (1997), “*Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*” Tatum’s question is relevant to my study since the participants of my research also indicate that they, as groups of Black students meet on campus regularly to study or for social interactions. Many participants say that the various groups of Black students are formed based on their geographical location and other similar interests. For example, participants state that the Caribbean, Rwandian, Nigerian and Ghanaian students all have informal meetings. Black students communing together is nothing new, and the reasons for communing haven’t changed much since Tatum’s book either.

One participant mentioned that although she had many other friends, she would instead socialize with people from the Caribbean (Imani). She further states most black students gather because

they feel comfortable with each other and that “I first came here, I felt 100% comfortable amongst people that I could relate to in certain situations.”

Berko also explained that there is an unspoken connection when you sit with a group of Black students, one that surpasses our identity and allows us to understand each other without prejudice. Similarly, Aster spoke about her comfort level when she sits in the ASG, she found that being together has allowed her to openly share the issues that are affecting her learning experiences and hearing what others have done to combat the situation.

Abieyo and Efua discussed the importance of a shared cultural identity, in foods and clothing. Efua talked about the ASG bringing Black students together to eat their traditional foods and to compare how the same cuisines are prepared by others differently. These significant opportunities reminded her of home. Moreover, it teaches her to appreciate the diverse culture across Africa and the diaspora.

Although some participants from the Caribbean were members of the Caribbean society, and the participants from Africa were informally meeting with other Black student from their countries, and the Canadian participants received support from their local communities, they all valued the membership of the ASG. These participants also indicated that they would often spend an unspecified number of hours every week working on behalf of the ASG. The ASG was in a sense, the ‘table’ where all the Black kids sat together in the cafeteria [MSVU].

Africentricity Promotes Community

Aladejebi (2014) states that

Africentricity promotes the collectivity and interconnectedness of African people. In spite of the importance of interconnectedness and collectivity, Africentricity does not interfere with the rights of individuals, and their pursuit of life’s happiness. Neither does it

preclude [an] individual from self-actualization. However, from an African centered perspective, human existence is communal. (p.135)

Participants' learning experiences were enhanced by being a part of a community [the ASG] that they identify with culturally. Participants not only saw the benefit to the existence of the ASG at MSVU, but are proud to call the group "home, a safe place and wanted to be identified as Black" (multiple participants). For example:

- "I don't know, being Black and continuously feeling kind of isolated, it was good to see and be around people that commonly deal with the issues I face, and that has familiarity with my issues." (Naak)
- "...the Africentric Support Group was just a group where young Black students could come and actually feel safe, you know." (Nuru)
- "So, it was great when I found other people like me, where it didn't feel awkward talking about my uncomfortable situations because they could relate to it, and there was help for me, and I knew anytime I needed it I could get it..." (Amaka)
- "...through the ASG, the people I met, knowing that they're either people who have been here before me and I can always go to them with whatever questions I had with my papers or with any professors, and things like that, so that was great for me." (Efua)

These narratives are reflective of Codjoe (2006) who found that

...the role played by a supportive environment that reinforces knowledge and pride in black cultural identity was the most gratifying and significant for the students [in his study]... it appears to be the most critical factor of all the factors identified as contributing to academic success (p.40).

Codjoe's (2006) findings drew my attention to some comments made by participants of this study. Some participants considered the ASG as the supportive environment that reinforces both knowledge and pride in their culture, for example, Aster mentioned that if it wasn't for the support of the ASG, she would not be at the Mount. Likewise, Efua credited the support of the ASG for the improvements in her academic work and Nubia stated that the ASG made her want to embrace her culture. All of these examples show that the participants were grateful for the cultural support they received. However, they would benefit from a supportive classroom environment that made an effort to identify them in the curriculum.

Dei (1996) found that by

‘... [the] development of an inclusive curriculum that promotes alternative, non-hegemonic ways of knowing and understanding our world,’ students can become engaged in their learning experience. He then suggests that we ‘consider a non-hegemonic Afrocentric education (curriculum and pedagogy) as one means to address the educational needs of specifically (but not exclusively) Black/African-Canadian students’ (p.170).

Archer (1992) adds, “an Afrocentric curriculum that is interesting, relevant, and historically accurate is also thought to increase motivation and improve performance [among Black students]” (p.780).

The question that remains unanswered by many scholars is, “what does an Africentric education look like?” To answer the question, I turn to Giddings (2001, p. 463) who provided an answer based on “the work of key players in the [Africentric] movement.” Giddings states that a comprehensive Africentric curriculum would strive toward the following five goals:

1. Assist students in developing the necessary intellectual, moral, and emotional skills for accomplishing a productive, affirming life in this society.

2. Provide such educational instruction as to deconstruct established hegemonic pillars and to safeguard against the construction of new ones.
3. Provide students of African descent with educational instruction that uses techniques that are in accord with their learning styles.
4. Assist students of African descent in maintaining a positive self-concept, with the goal of achieving a sense of collective accountability.
5. Serve as a model for Banks (1988) “Transformation” and “Social Action” approaches to multicultural education.

I draw on Giddings’ five goals to help analyze some of my findings. I suggest that the ASG is an agent that supports Black students formal education at MSVU. As its mandate, the ASG exists in the university setting to support the academic success of Black students²².

Nubia spoke of the ASG as a community that influenced her academic writing, community engagement and cultural identity:

...I met many good people through the ASG. And, it [the ASG] has helped me with school, being able to get ahead [completing course requirements before it’s taught in class] especially with my writing and all that. The ASG has impacted me in a way where I’ve been able to interact with people of colour. And I know being a part of the ASG has helped make me aware of my identity.

Similarly, Naak said, “...I know that I can relate to [Black students] and they can relate to me...”

Imani also indicated that receiving cultural support was essential to avoid feeling alienated. She states:

... [I] had Canadian friends, but they didn’t make a significant impact on my life, not to sound rude or anything, but they just didn’t make a significant impact on my life. And I

²² See www.msvu.ca/asg

felt like the people who were from the Caribbean or different African countries, made me feel more comfortable at the school as opposed to them [Canadian students]. Because I feel like, a lot of times they would just stick to their ways, and they wouldn't be as open [to other ways of knowing] as they should.

Efua's unique experience of joining the ASG in her second year at MSVU provided the ability for her to compare her prior experiences with the current, and she found that with ASG, "... just having a community of people, helped me to be more confident even to speak in class...." These participants recognize the personal impact of racism, alienation, and isolation. Although unaware of the meaning of Africentricity, the narratives show that participants saw the benefits of developing an identity that is supported by their cultural experiences.

Africentricity Provides Agency

Woodson (1933) asserts that a central premise behind Afrocentricity is that many Africans have been subjugated by limiting their awareness of themselves and being indoctrinated with ideas that work against them. (p.171)

Based on the narratives, most participants are still trying to understand who they are, as a Black/African person in North America. How did I get to this point? Let me remind you of my own experience as an international student, referenced in Chapter 1. As indicated, I had not developed consciousness, and there was no need to do so, before coming to Canada. I pointed out that it was not until I came to Canada that I became aware of my "blackness." Before this, I did not need to defend my "blackness," neither was there a need to speak of myself in terms of race.

In this regard, I found some startling similarities among participants experience and mine. For example: Nubia states that "...being a part of the ASG has helped make me aware of my identity." she also reported that prior to the ASG, "it was difficult, and it was tough."

Black students needed more than just being “included” in the activities of the university, but rather to be active in pursuit of their own rationality. When I say active in pursuit of our own rationality, it means that it shouldn’t take a transforming situation, such as racial discrimination, to trigger the need for a Black student to say, “ I want[ed] to identify... to be visible as a Black person. So, I would say the ASG has made me want to identify as a Black person.” (Nubia)

Canadian participants had a different experience. To Aster, a sense of identity is critical; she also indicated that being in a hypervigilant state of awareness was required to maintain sanity. She states that,

... I know it is difficult to imagine that somebody is interested in your success, but the ASG is. You know, we are always surrounded by the media that tells us that we should not trust each other, that we shouldn’t even trust ourselves, and that we don’t have anything to contribute, we have nothing to say, we’re surrounded by all these negative messages. And the ASG, you walk in, and you can feel it... you can just feel it, like; it’s a safe place to be... the ASG is open to being that [safe and welcoming] space for Black students. (Aster)

Asante (2009) states that “Afrocentricity is a paradigm based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity” (p.1). It therefore suggests that blacks or people of African ancestry must have a sense of their identity and agency. Asante further states that outside of Afrocentricity Black people cannot know who we are. Let me draw your attention again to Nubia struggle. She states “I struggle with, you know... my Black identity. I struggled with being a Black person.”

Unfortunately, Nubia’s struggle and comments were not isolated occurrences. Many participants from the Caribbean and Africa struggled with their identity and were unprepared to handle

discrimination or perceived discrimination. On the other hand, Canadian participants, especially at the graduate level, were better equipped to handle these situations.

An analysis of the interviews showed that participants were aware of the benefits of having the ASG as an agent and most were willing to invest time and resource to ensure that the entire community benefited. Many participants talked about receiving and providing academic assistance through the ASG. Which was a direct response to what Africentricity promotes.

Let me end this section by reflecting on Kennedy's (2012) experience. In her practicum report, she concluded the following concerns of African Canadian students:

- Cultural disconnection with faculty and/ or student body
- Class differences
- Absence of Minority Faculty
- Low expectations of Black students [by White faculty members].
- Negative attention was drawn to skin complexion
- Lack of cultural understanding by faculty and staff
- Lack of cultural or ethnic programming at MSVU

The response from the African Canadian students in Kennedy's report was quite similar to the responses I received from the participants of my study. Given that both data were collected at the same institution, it is then not surprising to find some similarities in the outcome of Black student experiences.

A common theme from the participants of my research was the lack of Black faculty members. This was common even in those programs that have a significant number of the Black students enrolled; for example, Business Administration and Arts. Although most participants expressed

that they'd never had a Black faculty instructing in their class, they equally shared that they would love to have the experience of being in a course that is taught by a Black professor.

For instance, participants from the Caribbean and Africa shared the following:

... you go around the school, and you don't have a Black professor. Someone at least you can relate to, I'm not saying I can't relate to the White professors or the faculty members, but it's good to have a person of colour ... you know, someone who has your experience in the faculty. (Nubia)

... to excel in what I do, when I go to class I listen, I looked beyond many things [my current situation], irrespective of how uncomfortable I might be... I'm listening to the professor talk about her area of expertise, and I'm making my own version of it [the lecture] in my mind. And there were times where it was difficult because I could not hold [understand] some words, or I could not relate to some examples, alright could not, I just didn't feel like I'm in the right place because it just felt foreign, yeah, that's the word. Yeah, it's been like that a lot. (Amaka)

... [my] professors were just at arm's length... It was just... no, I didn't have any close relationship with the staff [faculty] because I didn't feel like they were interested in that. I don't think any staff [faculty] really took particular interest in me or in my work. They like to hear my views in class, but that was about it. There wasn't, and even sometimes when I would go to them regarding certain things I didn't feel like they did justice to [explain well] or they really took their time but, ... I didn't feel a personal connection, I was already at another university [in Africa], and I knew how university life was, but it wasn't... it just wasn't the same [at MSVU]... (Efua)

Unlike the participants from the Caribbean and Africa, most Canadian participants did not experience being taught by a Black teacher in high school. However, all of the participants indicated that they still look forward to an opportunity to learn from a Black faculty member at the university. For example:

...You would be excited to see this [a Black faculty in the classroom] in a Predominately White [Institution], you would be excited to see a Black professor lecturing to you... (Ife)

Parris and Brigham's (2010) study show that another group of Black students at the same institution (MSVU) received the opportunity to learn in an Africentric environment, "which means people of African descent are centered in the content, pedagogy/andragogy, and analysis," (p.209) and reported their satisfaction. For example:

To write about things that are important to us, it was respected and it was encouraged in the program. ... I was able to infuse my own personal history into ... the assignments. I wrote about my experience on school advisory councils ... I talked about my grandmother, and about ...black feminism, womanism ... that just like blew my mind. That was so empowering. And taking ...the articles ...and trying to see my own experiences within them ...[There was] a lot of reflective work that was done. I wasn't a journal writer before. Every day there were light bulb moments. It was like all these thoughts, all my childhood and my young adulthood experiences, and to be able to use that, to shape that and to apply that to research and find other articles to prove some points. It was just like, 'Wow!' It was just incredible. (Sara) (pp. 210-211)

An Africentric education at a post-secondary level produces positive outcomes for both the Black student and the university. Despite the successes reported by this cohort, no further actions were taken to continue the Africentric Cohort program or to expand the concept to the undergraduate level.

I see the dire need for Black students to learn in an Africentric environment, based on the success of the research mentioned above. As such, I believe that further investigation should be done to find out how the university can introduce a similar program at the undergraduate level.

Critical Race Theory

The narratives of this thesis support the findings that some participants experienced racism discrimination at MSVU. For another group of participants, while talking about their experiences of racism, they deny that they were affected by it. According to Parris and Brigham (2010), who conducted research on a group of graduate students enrolled in an Africentric Leadership cohort at a PWI, “Racism is to society as water is to the fish, in other words, we are so immersed that racism has become unacknowledged even though it is fundamental to our everyday social interactions,” (p.211).

To talk about racism is like choosing to go around a large body of water on foot rather than crossing by boat to get to the same point. In other words, one knows that racism exists but chooses to avoid it at all cost for fear of getting too entrenched in trying to explain its effects on them and society at large.

Shelton and Sellers (cited in Aladejebi, 2015 p.150) state that “the tendency for visible minorities to define themselves in terms of race is closely linked to shared experiences within the group.”

This remark is supported by Codjoe (2006, p.41), who suggests that across the diaspora, there is a tendency for Black students to define themselves based on their geographical location. For example, the Black Caribbean students tend to identify themselves as either ‘Black or Caribbean,’ while the Black Canadian students identify as ‘African Canadian or African Nova Scotians’ and students from continental Africa, identify themselves as ‘Africans.’

This does not negate the fact that some individuals from these sub-groups tend to identify themselves differently. Since, according to Parris and Brigham (2010), “Race is a social-political

ideological construct that has social, political and economic consequences. Its power is sustained through the perseverance of racism and processes of racialization,” (p.211). Crosby (2010) contends, “while allegations of racism in Canadian post-secondary institutions have become public knowledge, the discourse of denial still persists” (p.405). Rollock (2012, cited in Aladejebi 2015) states, “CRT contends that racism is normal and ubiquitous and as a result affects the lives of visible minorities and members of racialized groups” (p.150).

Aladejebi states, “...for individuals of African ancestry, identification with “blackness” is an empowerment to fighting racism and discrimination,” (p.151).

As mentioned earlier, although most participants did not explicitly state that they felt discrimination, their narratives told the story, and it was complemented by the need for identification with “blackness” through the ASG. For example

...I must confess that I just found that most of the time I was with people I felt more comfortable with, which is obviously other Africans or students of African descent. Because, I might’ve mentioned earlier that it’s easier when you’re talking to somebody who can relate to what you’re saying and you do make sense to them and what they say I can also relate to, and you’re not trying really hard to be in a safe zone. (Amaka)

And,

I felt like they’re the people who are like me. Like, they would understand the same experiences I have. Like..., they probably faced the same culture shock or differences that I have faced, so I felt that that was a good initiative for the student..., for someone like me. (Imani)

Nubia's comments on the topic expressed the need for Black participants to congregate where their "blackness," is supported. She said that "...wanting to identify... to be visible as a Black person. So, I would say the ASG has made me want to identify as a Black person."

The goal of the ASG at MSVU has always been to empower students of African descent, with the Africentric paradigm in mind. For example, the ASG provided academic support, community-networking opportunities, skills training, significant event planning and advocating on behalf of Black students.

Participants have also come to recognize that many of these services were offered on campus, but have strategically managed to exclude Black students and that the ASG acted as the community hub where they can openly or privately discuss issues and receive culturally appropriate support. One participant from the focus group interview stated,

...just the sense of belonging that [the ASG] offers. Because, [the ASG] puts you in the midst of the students of colour, from all sorts of, you know from all different countries, and you learn a lot about other people's culture and perspectives and life...(AF1)²³

Comparing their interaction with the ASG and other offices on campus, another participant from the focus group provided the following analogy,

certain things you hear from one person [staff] who tells you this, then another person [staff] tells you something else. And again, they all appear on the surface, to want to be helpful, but those being misdirected can really sort of put a student off course. Without the ASG as the rudder in the back of the boat, no we're going in this direction, and Randy is standing up in front with the lamp, going, 'don't keep going that way.' I know I wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation. (CA1)²⁴

²³ AF1 – African student with the number 1 who participated in the focus group interview.

²⁴ CA1 – Canadian student with the number 1 who participated in the focus group interview.

To say that there is a lack of Black representation on campus in 2017 is an understatement and an echo of the BLAC Report, which recommended that the department of education “allocate sufficient funds for additional and appropriate staff to continue the revision of the curriculum at every level of education, so that it fully reflects the cultural diversity of Nova Scotia.” (p. 20). Many participants identified the lack of faculty representation in the classroom as a significant hindrance to their learning experience. This is supported by Guiffrida (2006, p.459) who found evidence to show that strong relationships with faculty are crucial to student success at college. However, as mentioned, none of the participants had ever been instructed by a Black instructor at MSVU. In addition to this, they were not likely to approach their professors for academic guidance. This meant that many Black students were forced to find a new source for academic support, and as participants identified, the ASG happens to be one of those areas to bear much of this responsibility.

Along with the absence of Black faculty, the BLAC Report called for a change in the curriculum which was dominated by the Eurocentric view. The report states that “Cultural education is essential for the development of a cultural identity.” (p.41). Participants from all groups provided narratives that show that their university experience lacked the appropriate cultural enrichment nuances they received at their previous institution. The narratives from the Canadian participants were received a bit differently. Two of the three participants reflected on the presence of guidance counselors and appropriate cultural courses as a motivator at their previous institution, while the third never enquired about available courses or cultural support.

For the other participants, learning in a context that alienates their culture is new to many of them, and as such, they tend to gravitate towards each other for support. As a result “Black

students turn to each other for the much-needed support they are not likely to find anywhere” Tatum (1997, p.60) to persevere and graduate.

In taking a critical look at the way Black students are represented on campus today, one cannot help but recall the BLAC that states: “for almost two centuries, Black communities have demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the content, context and teaching styles of the curriculum of the public school system” (p.40).

According to the participants, their post-secondary institution was unprepared for them. Some participants also recognize that their degree at MSVU did not adequately prepare them for to reintegrate and build their communities. (see the narratives in the previous chapter).

Similarly, most participants reported that they were the only Black student in most classes, which is something reported by the BLAC Report (1994). The BLAC (1994, p.39) also addressed this issue along with two others, as “major categories [that] emerged related to the situation facing Black learners in Nova Scotia...” as:

- Institutional and systemic barriers;
- Socio-economic factors; and,
- Negative perceptions affecting Black learners.

Institutional and Systemic Barriers

Ladson-Billings (1998) points out that “Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script,” (p.18). All but one participant experienced evidence of this normalcy and turning a blind eye to other ways of knowing outside a Eurocentric curriculum.

When I speak of “turning a blind eye,” I turn to Hampton (2010) who found

Canadian claims to being colour-blind in education, and in other contexts, were closely related to an emphasis on homogeneity and the denial of the significance of ethno-

cultural heritage and lived experiences of racism. In this context, ‘multicultural education’ uses White, western culture as its point of departure and, all too often, settles for superficial definitions of culture that focus on generalised, overt characteristics such as dress, food and holiday celebrations, while social equity and diversity are under-emphasised (p.105).

This continuous oversight or willful neglect by the university to address the issues of exclusion of African ancestry from the curriculum to maintain, according to Swartz (1992) a, “Master scripting [which] silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white, upper-class, male voicings as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know” (p.341).

I say willful neglect to bring to light to the fact that the BLAC Report was produced in 1994 and in 2018 participants are still asking, “where is the inclusive curriculum?”

At least one participant from each geographical location felt that their classroom contributions were overlooked, with at least one participant deciding to stop contributing to class discussions altogether. This participant also mentioned that she managed to contextualize the content of her course material to reflect her identity. However, this meant that the student had to do double the work for the same mark, sometimes for a lesser grade.

Although most participants did not claim to have an issue with their grades, it was the graduate participants from outside Canada that were most affected by this issue. It leads me to assume that the undergraduate participants were unaware or did not know how to articulate this issue since at least one undergraduate participant reported being alienated from the classroom in this way.

Bringing the idea of a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum and an assessment that is based on the curriculum means that many Black participants, especially the international participants, start their degree at a disadvantage and are always playing catch up.

For participants in this study, not all knowledge is considered useful or applicable to the academy and therefore cannot be considered as a bonus during the final assessment.

Socio-economic Factors

Ladson-Billings states, “Perhaps no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding. CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism.” (p.20). Although I recognize that Ladson-Billings addressed the socio-economic factors of African Americans learners in the context of the funding available for comparable institutions, I would like to draw your attention to its effects on the individual participants of my study. Based on the narratives, one has to ask why most participants encountered financial issues during their studies. In fact, all but one participant from each geographical area experienced financial problems while enrolled at MSVU.

These participants raised the following concerns:

- **Lack of funds:**

“I simply ran out of money when I came to Canada, although I budgeted for a year, my funds ran out in four months...” (Ife)

“my government blocked large sums of money from leaving the country, without clearance from a government official, to curb the issue of money laundering. This happened just around the time when my tuition fees were due...” (Nubia)

“I didn’t get enough money from Nova Scotia student loan to cover my tuition fees because I live at home...” (Abioye)

- **Lack of scholarships or bursaries:**

Almost every participant expressed that they were disappointed that there was no scholarship or bursaries specifically available for Black students and that applying for the general scholarships was a waste of time because it appeared to them that they

most certainly would be going to a White student. (Ife, Berko, Imani, Amaka, and Nubia)

- **Education as an additional family expense:**

Aster was the only participant that responded in this category and expressed that returning to the academy after some years means that she will need to adjust her family spending to fund her education. (Aster)

- **Completing forms for funding (bursary and scholarships):**

Three participants credited the ASG for assisting with completing the forms for bursaries and scholarship. These participants said that although the forms are straightforward, putting the forms into their context is usually difficult since the forms were set up for the Canadian applicants only. (Ife, Nubia, and Berko)

The issue of funding for Black students education is not a new one. In fact, it was mentioned as a recommendation in the BLAC Report (p.20). However, this concern continues to be a Black student issue.

Ife reckons that had it not been for the Financial Aid Officer (at that time) she would not be studying at MSVU today since she didn't have enough money available to finance her education. She was appreciative of the way the Officer responded to her bursary application. Nubia also indicated that she had some financial difficulties when she began studying at MSVU. She then expressed her appreciation for the support she received from a White faculty member, who encouraged her to apply for a scholarship, which provided some financial stability when she received the award.

Often times, students are told that the funding is available for everyone, so they should just apply. This rhetoric is seldom accepted by Black students. This is quite similar to Imani's

complaint that none of the scholarship and financial opportunities sent out by the ASG applies to her and that she would like to see more opportunities posted that reflects her. Participants are looking for funding opportunities that are connected to their Black/African identity.

Hence some participants felt motivated to apply for bursary and scholarships only when they received the support of a White staff or faculty. This motivation sometimes comes through the ASG. Others believe that they just couldn't apply without help, and as such would miss deadlines.

Negative perceptions affecting Black learners

I introduced the concept of "Stereotype Threat," as put forward by Steele (1995) in the literature review, and although many participants did not provide sufficient narrative to support that it was an issue, I was still able to decipher, from the narratives, the anxiety of some participants when we discussed 'race.' This was especially common among the undergraduate participants and the Caribbean participants.

Based on the analysis, I can only assume that these participants' apprehension to talk about racial issues were base on their inability to articulate the meaning of the situation at the time, such as microaggression and other forms of subtle racism. Another assumption is their fear of somehow being identified as the participant on record with a claim of racism.

The participants in the focus group, as well as Aster, Nubia, and Efua show that participants are aware of the negative attention Blacks encounter on a daily basis in the media and society, and as such, they expressed gratitude for the ASG. Aster's analogy is that the mere existence of the ASG presents a counterbalance to the overwhelmingly negative press Black students encounter on campus and in the community.

All participants viewed the ASG as an agent of change. It is also seen as a place of refuge for many participants who just wanted to be infused in a cultural setting, even if it is for a brief

moment. However, most participants used “home or family” to describe their experiences with the ASG.

To summarize the analysis of critical race theory, I join Brigham (2003, cited in Aladejebi, 2013) in asking,

Why [then] should adult education scholars, students, and practitioners be concerned with race”? Brigham addresses this question from two perspectives: racism is pervasive and is ingrained into everyday ‘way of doing things’ and there is the normalcy of Whiteness against which ‘Otherness’ is measured and validated (p.153).

Luckily, many participants, especially the graduate participants, are willing to challenge this normalcy of Whiteness and otherness that is regularly overlooked by many.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

In this final chapter, I begin by providing an overview of the previous six chapters. I also provide a summary of the critical points raised in this research, discuss the implications of the findings, present the main conclusions, identify the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

A Summary of Chapters in this Thesis

By providing a summary of chapters one-six, I remind the readers of the essential information presented in each chapter that ties this research together. I will also identify some key points raised in each chapter to be discussed later.

Chapter 1 introduced my thesis topic and provided a contextual framework for the study. It also provides the reader with a historical perspective of the education system in Canada and the African Canadian experience in Nova Scotia. It also provides a historical overview of the contribution MSVU made to influence education in Canada. In addition to the historical framework, *Chapter 1* provides a contextual framework by giving the reason for this study through the lenses of my personal experience and the experiences of two other Black graduate studies students at MSVU. In this chapter I also a brief overview of the Africentricity, one of the theories I used to frame this research.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the selected literature. This chapter begins by providing current literature about the educational system in Canada and its goal to provide an equitable education for all Canadians. I then looked at scholarly works done that identify the learning experiences of Black students. Within the literature, I found some common issues that work against Black students in academia. I presented some of these issues found by researchers like Codjoe, Dei, Paul, Brigham, and James. For example:

- Identity and negative racial stereotype
- Racism
- Biases in the school curriculum and textbooks

I then discussed how these issues, mentioned above, if addressed promptly, could work towards building a stronger society by producing confident citizens. It is evident that there is a lack of research done on Black students in post-secondary institutions in Canada and as such, I presented valid reasons for being able to use a parallel to research done in the USA to inform my work.

Chapter 3 outlines the methods of the inquiry for the study. I discuss the relevance of an Africentric Informed Qualitative Research Methodology (AIQM) by drawing on the seven criteria of Africentric methodology.

This explained the recruitment process and discussed how I selected research participants. It then presents how I analyzed the data using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as proposed by Smith and Osborn (2007). Towards the end of *Chapter 3*, I provided a brief description of each research participants.

Chapter 4 focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. I present Africentricity as the overarching framework by discussing how it brings to the forefront, in every situation, the centrality of the African person (Asante 1980, 1991, 2014), Woodson (1933), Mkabela 2005). Critical Race Theory is discussed from the perspective of Ladson-Billings (1998), as a useful tool for explaining the relevance of race in education.

Chapter 5 presents the research findings. The chapter presents an overview of how the findings evolved through the application of the interpretative phenomenological analysis thematic analysis. I discuss how the themes were generated and discussed the findings based on the three distinct groups the participants represent, namely, the Caribbean, African and Canadian.

Chapter 6 focuses on the analysis and discussions of the findings relative to the theoretical frameworks.

Points Raised in this Research

The research has raised some questions that demand answers. I hope that participants' voices, the emerging themes, and the analysis of findings have provided some answers to these probing questions.

As mentioned in my personal statement, I was motivated to pursue this study based on my personal experiences as a student at MSVU.

I began working at MSVU immediately after completing my undergraduate studies. During that period (2007-2013), I continue to witness many Black students pass through the university system without receiving appropriate support, especially cultural support. It became more apparent to me, during the six years period, that my White classmates were utilizing the resources on campus differently. For example, while a Black student approaches a service center, such as the Student Union with skepticism, the White students approached the same center with a sense of confidence and privilege.

After several failed attempts to support Black students, I was able to start the 'Support Group for Students of African Descent' in 2012, which had its name change to the Africentric Support Group in 2013 formed. As mentioned earlier, before the ASG, MSVU attracted Black students from around the world as it has always done, but it was only when the ASG was formed that Black students had designated cultural support. Based on internal reports, ever since then the university continued to experience both an increase in enrollment and retention for Black students.

I (Headley, (2014) found that records for the first time records were kept by the ASG to show Black students' contribution to the MSVU community (pp. 23-30). These contributions were

explicitly geared towards the cultural needs of Black students at MSVU, and were used to empower other Black students. One focus group participant said:

...What I like is that the Africentric Support Group has [become an ally for Black students], but it has also given many of us in this room opportunities to see that we also have those skills. We can bring the different skills we have forward because there is in that sense of mentorship [in the ASG]. And all of this goes back to the lack of those things, for me goes back to, again those destabilizing forces that aren't overt at all times, most of the times they are somewhat subversive, but we feel them. (CA1)²⁵

In Chapter 1, I used “university unpreparedness” to highlight the fact that although the university continued to see a rise in the number of Black students, it has made no effort to increase of support, more specifically, cultural supports to match the increases. For this reason, most of the needs Black students encountered were handled by the ASG.

Dei and Kempf (2013), state that “the problem is not so much that particular youth fail in school, but that many schools are failing particular youth ... countless policy initiatives have not prevented racialized results from persisting points unambiguously to the misdirection of policy” (p.39).

Swail (2003, cited in Headley, 2014) reckons that there are three factors to determine whether a students' experience would be a good one. He listed these factors as Cognitive, Social and Institutional factors (p.9). For the Black student, Dei and Kempf (2013) proposed an African-Centered Education, which includes the following, “The Community- (the university, the instructors, community leaders and elders)” (p.40).

²⁵ Canadian participant at the focus group #1

To understand the needs of Black students, let me draw your attention to the literature before turning back to the student narratives. Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) theorize the problem concerning traditional education is that “African [ancestry] students are taught to perceive the world through the eyes of another culture, and unconsciously learn to see themselves as an insignificant part of their world” (p. 8).

Similarly, Asante (2003), theorizing Africentricity states that it is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate... it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena...” (p.2)

As indicated by Asante (2003) and Dei and Kempf (2013), an Africentric education is designed to empower peoples of the African diaspora.

Participants stated that despite the difficulties they encounter while studying at MSVU, they feel that the ASG is the one place to advocate on their behalf and put their interest to the forefront.

For example:

... just the sense of belonging that it [the ASG] offers. Because, it puts you in the midst of the students of colour, from all sorts of... you know, from all different countries and you learn a lot about other people’s culture and perspectives and life. Also, through the ASG, I did get two jobs [offers after graduation] ... (AF1)

...I did some work with the ASG, but I think the most valuable one that I can think about is the experiences I had with other students, where they would come to me with a paper or an assignment for help... (AF2)

“... somebody else is now coming along to do that [be the ASG Coordinator], and we hope that that person will survive being able to do a full-time job in quarter-time.

Somehow, we need... hopefully, this research will provide that opportunity [for the

MSVU to see the need for a full-time ASG coordinator]... because the ASG is too vital to like, just fizzle out [vanish] because one person [Randy] isn't there,..." (CA1)

And

And again, that's what the ASG gives us; it's the opportunity not just to be lost in our own story. We get to sit around with each other; through Randy as the coordinator; we get to realize that, oh we're not the only ones! So, it was Randy who was telling me, 'oh no--no--no, I want to introduce you to this person, because maybe you have something to help support them,' or maybe 'I want to introduce you to this person so that they can support you.' (CA1)

... always want to give back, yeah, that's some of the key things that kept me sane while attending university, you know. Other than the fact that the ASG was here to help me, just some of those key things that I kept [to] myself, [to]get me going along and now I am done. (CB1)

Being in the room with the focus group participants was inspiring. Before this meeting, I never understood the effects of my contribution to the Black student. I was aware that they were benefiting from the work I was doing, but I did not know to what extent.

As mentioned above, although I am aware that the ASG, with its limited resources, supports an increasing number of Black students each year, I was unaware of how those students who did not benefit from all of the services felt. The following feedback was provided during the one-to-one interviews:

...when I look at the ASG emails, a lot of the scholarships and [job] opportunities were meant for Black [African] Nova Scotians, if you know what I mean? It's either like, Black Nova Scotians or like a Black single mom, or something like

that. And it's like, just for a simple student, I'm not Canadian; I just come from another country. If there's any possible way that you can help me out because I am 100% willing to give back to the same place that educated me... (Imani)

I also received communication from Nubia, which indicates that the ASG needed to connect with Black students at the orientation stage. She states that

... I'd like the ASG to start with the new students from orientation. Because most times, you see some students... those students don't even know what the ASG is about because they didn't have that education from the beginning, from the orientation. So, I would like the ASG to really start from orientation...

Nubia's comments came from her personal experience of being excluded from the emailing list for one semester because she joined MSVU in the summer.

Some participants from Africa had a perceived notion about schooling in Western countries, based on information they received through recruitment events. They all recognize that schooling in Canada is different from that of their home country in many ways, for example, the course content and the various support systems available. Amaka, Berko, and Efua further indicated that many students attend private schools, which generally uses a Eurocentric approach to education, with the hope of being prepared for post-secondary education in Western countries. Amaka called this, "having a colonial mentality."

Although many international participants experienced culture shock when they first enrolled at MSVU, based on the findings, the participants who attended private schools in Africa found that by learning in a Eurocentric environment they know little about their own cultural identity. The adjustment period for these participants took a bit longer.

Throughout the study, it was apparent that many participants were aware of the resources and support available on campus, but chose not to access the services for one fundamental reason: they were unable to identify with the services.

Some participants also expressed discomfort because of the inequity they experienced in the classroom and on campus. By recognizing that the needs of Black students are different, the ASG was able to repackage some of the available services to reflect the identity of the Black students.

The feelings of neglect cannot be ignored on a campus that prides itself on being inclusive since some participants expressed feeling alienated from their curriculum and the campus. And although there was no clear evidence of racism reported by participants on campus, some participants reported that they felt they were discriminated against because of their race. I found some similarities to Paul's (2012) findings in that, participants did not dwell on the topic of racism, and appeared uncomfortable when the topic arose.

AF1 explained that racism came "from outside [off-campus], where you're being called the "N" word... I've experienced that. Walking on the street and somebody in their car just screaming the "N" word at me." She further states that "when you go [back] to the university it's not much of a different experience, it's not a safe haven." Some participants stated that having the ASG, a place where they can commune and take stock of what is happening around them, was helpful in providing a space to talk about the issues affecting them, in a friendly environment.

There is a need for changes to the way Black students experience their education at a PWI, and the need can no longer be ignored. To turn a blind eye to the needs of Black students is to embrace colour-blindness under the rhetoric of inclusivity. It, therefore, means that our post-

secondary institutions have the responsibility to critically analyze the curriculum and make changes to the way they educate Black students at post-secondary institutions.

Limitations of the Study

Luke, Green & Kelly, (2010) found that the demand for evidence has opened a Pandora's Box of arguments over the appropriate grounds for documenting and analyzing student socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic background..." (p.8). The diversity and levels of research that are admitted, as "evidence" is a crucial matter; certain research and evidence are valued over others. The assumption is, according to Patton (1990), qualitative methods "typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases" (p.14).

Patton's assumption speaks to the strength of this research which used Africentric Informed Qualitative Research Methodology. One criticism of this method, according to Mkabela (2005) is that emphasizes the active involvement of the "researched,"... and that participants are treated as colleagues rather than merely research participants.

Mkabela states that "...in some cases to be limited to being consulted on research priorities, design, and assisting in the execution and evaluation of research results. They have been treated as "informants" rather than colleagues and equals" (183).

My previous role as the ASG coordinator and as a current Black student at MSVU may be regarded as having a biased approach to conducting this research. However, these issues were raised and discussed in the ethics application, I also draw your attention to Hickling-Hudson (2006) who attests, and every researcher brings some level of personal bias into the investigation.

Reviere (2001, cited in Aladejebi, 2014) states that *Ujamaa* and *Uhaki* call on respectful consensus between the researcher and the researched and moreover since the researcher cannot be considered more knowledgeable than the researched, "the ultimate authority, as defined by Africentrism, must be the experiences of the community members" (p.80).

The intent of this study was not to generalize the results, but to provide an in-depth analysis of each participants' learning experiences at MSVU, and as they perceive them. This investigation would have benefited from a larger sample. The use of a larger sample size would generate additional information and knowledge into the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU. Furthermore, it would have allowed for further examination of the extent and nature of experiences such as racism, alienation and identity issues students contend with while enrolled at MSVU.

Recommendations and Future Research

My research presents new literature in an area that has not been adequately explored. The Black student learning experience is typically explored at the elementary or high school level. There is no known study on the learning experiences of African ancestry university students that encompasses the entire African diaspora in Canada.

In a small way, this research also contributed to “the theory of social change,” when it addressed the need for an Africentric infused curriculum at a PWI in Nova Scotia. This research has also contributed to the current literature, which shows that Black students at Canadian education institutions encounter instances of institutional discrimination and how they deal with these instances.

This thesis raises some relevant concerns about the lack of cultural representation on Canadian campuses and in the classrooms at the post-secondary level. For this reason, I believe that my research will pave the path for future studies to better understand the effects and benefits of a truly multicultural campus.

There is, therefore, a need to understand the experiences of all students irrespective of race, gender, status, class or country of origin. As Glean (2012, cited in Paul 2012) “If discrimination is implicating one group, then all groups will be affected,” I then argue that additional research

need to be conducted to find out how the other groups of students are affected. I would also argue that stakeholders in education should swiftly address the cultural exclusion of Black students from the curriculum and ensure the inclusion is not an afterthought.

I would also argue that there should be an investigation on the experiences of the few Black staff and faculty at the university, as they are often asked to provide cultural guidance, though unofficially, to a group of students that requires supports.

Finally, recognizing the contribution of the ASG as a cultural space for Black students is essential. From 2013-2017 I coordinated the affairs of the ASG and reported to the university. To dissolve the ASG at the end of this research is to reopen wounds that have just begun to heal. Equally, inhibiting its growth is to allow a person that is not of African ancestry to coordinate the activities of the ASG or to have total control of the day-to-day running of the ASG office.

Personal Reflections

Conducting this investigation about the learning experiences of Black students at MSVU has been a great reflection tool to help me understand my undergraduate learning experiences at MSVU from 2003-2007. Although I claimed this experience as mine, the many participants recognized in the acknowledgment can echo my sentiments and lay claim to this experience.

The journey through this study has taken me to the ends of the earth. Through the eyes of the participants and through the Black students coming from North (Iceland), South (South America), East (Africa) and west (Canada and other westernized societies), I was able to understand the true meaning of Africentricity and will continue to learn.

Founding the ASG was one of my significant contributions to the Black community at MSVU, and although I will never understand how it affected the lives of the many Black students that passed through MSVU, I can rest assured that they were given the opportunity to meet in a safe space with other students with similar cultural experiences.

The ASG has always been intimately connected to my research, and although I've been with this group from day one, I continue to be surprised by some of its accomplishments. For example, influencing Black students to undertake research that will strengthen their communities and developing a scholarship fund for Black students at MSVU.

Finally, I reflect on Tatum's (1997) question, "why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? And I respond with a simple answer from one of the research participants, "go where you are welcomed, and the ASG welcomed me." (CA1)

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APPENDIX A

Pre-screening Questionnaire

- Do you identify yourself as Black/African (person of African ancestry)?
 - Yes
 - No

- Do you identify as:
 - Male
 - Female

- Please choose one that applies to you. Where did you complete your high school diploma?
 - Canada
 - Caribbean (Including Bermuda)
 - Africa
 - Other, please indicate. _____.

- Your current year of study
 - 2nd year undergraduate
 - 3rd year undergraduate
 - 4th year undergraduate
 - Post/Graduate, please indicate your current year of study _____.
 - other, please indicate. _____.

- Age range
 - 18 or younger
 - 19 or older

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Main question:

- Tell me about your experiences at MSVU.

Probes:

- Describe the last two years of your formal learning experiences in secondary or post-secondary before applying to MSVU.
- What were your early learning experiences on arrival at MSVU?
- What has helped you to be successful in your study?
- Please tell me about those areas you find challenging, in your undergraduate and graduate experience at MSVU, and how you overcame them?
- Describe your interaction with MSVU staff, professors and fellow students (including those with Black/African descent).
- How did these interactions influence your learning experience?
- What role did the ASG play in your learning experience at MSVU?
- Please tell me about an experience you think have benefited your learning experience at MSVU.



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APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT POSTER

TITLE OF STUDY: The learning experiences of members of an Africentric Support Group at a small urban-based Nova Scotian university

RESEARCHER: Randy Headley, Candidate, Master of Arts in Education, Studies in Lifelong Learning, Mount Saint Vincent University. E-mail: Randy.Headley@msvu.ca or call [REDACTED].

Research Participants Needed

- ❖ Are you interested in participating in a study about the learning experience of Black students at MSVU who were/are part of the Africentric Support Group (ASG)?
- ❖ Are you a current MSVU student or a recent (within the last year) graduate of MSVU?
- ❖ Do you self-identify as a person of Black/African descent?
- ❖ Are you 19 years or older?
- ❖ Did you participate in the activities of the Africentric Support Group (ASG) within the last 1 to 4 years?
- ❖ Are you from Canada, Africa, the Caribbean or Bermuda?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

If you have answered yes to the above questions, please contact me as soon as possible. I look forward to talking with you about your learning experiences and the role of the ASG in your experience at MSVU.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Participants will be asked to commit to a focus group session (a group interview with 8 other participants) that last will be approximately 2 hours and/or a one-to-one interview that will be approximately one hour.

Refreshments will be served at the focus group session

Your participation is **voluntary** and your responses to the questions in the individual interview will be **confidential**.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive **\$20 cash**.

Thank you

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

This study has been approved by the University Ethics Review Board of Mount Saint Vincent University.

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Interview Transcript

Randy Good evening everyone today, the 29th August 2017. As I explained earlier, when referring to each other during this interview, please use the first two letters of your region and the number that was assigned. For example (*AF1- African participant #1, CA1- Canadian participant #1 and CB1- Caribbean participant #1*). Also, as a reminder, the title of this study is, “The learning experiences of members of an Africentric Support Group at a small urban-based university.”

We will begin the interview, just remember as well that all of the information received here today will be held in confidence, and none of your private information will be made public to anyone. Moreover, as I said earlier, we’ll be using your initials, for now, to facilitate in securing your identity. We will begin the interview by just having a general discussion how about on *your experience at Mount Vincent University as a Black student*.

Randy so we can start with Miss AF1.

AF1 So one thing that stood out for me coming here, was the fact that, I did not have any help until I got into the classroom. So, I got to the classroom on the first day of school, and everyone was talking about assignments and papers that have already been read, which I had no idea about because I was not aware of how technology was being used in the classroom at the Mount compared to back home. Moreover, that was a problem for me for the first week until I was able to teach myself and get a hold of that. However, something else that stood out for me was the stereotypical views and trying so hard not to perpetuate stereotypes of being loud and talking too much. I consider myself a very opinionated student who likes to express my views but noticed that in a predominately White institution my views are entirely different based on the topics being discussed. But, there are times when I want to speak, but I fear that I might speak too much, and do want not to come off as aggressive with my speaking or my opinions. But personally, over time I got over the syndrome because I knew that my voice had to be heard. But I think a student who is probably less confident, or not as confident as I am, would definitely just be quiet all through, just because they are scared of perpetrating that stereotype.

AF3 I think I had the same experience when I came, I actually struggled a lot because I also didn’t have any help with assignments. I went to the Writing Center, and their explanation was not very clear, the emphasis was that It was simple and I should understand it, but it was not clear. So, I struggled a lot with assignments, studying doing presentations, amongst other academic requirements. It was really hard for me, it was so hard, that sometimes I would cry in class because I was struggling, it was really bad. But once I started a class where I made a connection with an Instructor that taught us indigenous knowledge, and she helped me to better express myself. I actually have that

problem with any of the people that taught me about talking in class, because they always wanted my opinion. They will say, we want to know about your experience as a Black woman, or as an African woman. I found it hard to talk about it, but then I started getting used to it after attending the indigenous knowledge class. Because, once the class started we're asked to talk about our day, for instance, what occurred during the week, etc. It helped me to start talking about my experiences in class, especially when it came to particular topics when it's talking about our day and all that. I think we had some similarities. I must emphasize I struggled a lot when I came, but it wasn't easy for me. I just couldn't adapt to the new system. So it's just totally overwhelming and unforgettable.

CA1 I want to say, as somebody who is Canadian born that was raised here that, and as somebody who spent a lot of time in institutions, because of my work, I still found that there was a lot of, whether intentional or otherwise, destabilizing of students. So, putting you in a position where you're coming the first day of class, and you're already starting behind, or putting you in a position where we are going to give you so much resource, but we would not give you access to all the resources. Those kinds of things can really put a student in a position where they feel like you have to do more to move forward. So, in my own case I started classes before applying to the program, and in the process of my application, some people were very encouraging. And then at one point when I had actually completed all my application, I was told by somebody who was on the committee to make the decision or not, that they were not going to count any of my credits that I had already completed. Moreover, my grade point average at that point was 3.85. so when I ask, "why are you not going to be giving me credit for any of my courses?" well they would only be preparatory courses." I said, oh! Well, my professors didn't give me the sort of special consideration to say that my classes were "just preparatory," like I'm just auditing class. I had to do all of the same work like everybody else so why would this be the case, to this day I still have no sort of reason why I was given that threat of removing my credits. So, in the midst of all of that is happening, I had one course that I didn't finish, and lots of other things were happening in my life. By not getting the support from the university, I felt discouraged and did not hand in a final paper, because I thought it would not make a difference if they're not going to count it towards my credit. Now flash forward a year later, they realized that they couldn't take my credit away, but now I'm being told that "as pertains to the course, I was told I have to pay to redo that course." So there's always ways that are found to check us in some way or make sure we are kept in check at least that is my experience. Seems to be!

AF2 I think, for me being here was my first time of being in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) where there weren't many people like me. And then in my program too, just thinking about it right now, I was the only African in all of my classes. So, there were a few classes that there were people of other races, so it was in those moments, I felt ok and not just the odd one out. But usually I was always the odd one out, and I realize the kind of effect that had on me, then I would usually not talk a lot, but that actually added to the pressure, because I felt that if there were a lot of people like me they would

understand when I speak, and the examples I share would make sense to them. But, they've been times in class where illustrations were given, and then everybody else gets the joke, they'd be laughing, and I have no idea why what was said seemed funny, so I just thought, maybe because I didn't grow up here, so I'm not going to attach any emotion to it, I'm just going to take it because I didn't grow up here. So, in some way, I wouldn't say restricted me, but it reduced the way I would talk about things in class, I would hardly, unless I do not understand it very well. If it's something I could go back and read about, then I would not ask in class. Unless it's critical, in cases where I had no idea what the Instructor was talking about. Then I would be confident to express that I don't understand, but in most of my classes, I would be quiet. There were some professors that I met individually, so I think they had an idea that I was a little shy. So in class, they would kind of probe me to say something, like what you think about, or what do you see about this? So, those particular Instructors were very supportive in class. I found that in those classes I was more opened and talking. But mostly, no.

Randy do you ever feel the need to share your knowledge with the professors? Say, for instance; you make an appointment to go to their office after class, and say, "I have something to share pertaining to that topic that we can educate the rest of the class."

AF2 There's actually, a very exact example where this same professor was quite supportive in class. We had a little discussion in class, and almost everybody was thinking that way, but I thought the other way and I didn't understand why everybody was thinking that way, so I just kept quiet. I was thought that, maybe it's just a cultural thing, so I didn't talk about it. But, then after class, I met with her and we talked and she openly told me, what you're saying is true, but there's just a lot of people who are thinking that way in class, like she gets a clear distinction. So, maybe I should have talked about it in class.

AF1 And, also on the flipside, which also relates to what AF3 and AF2 have said, sometimes you're just put on the spot just because you're the only African in class become the only party or person of colour in class. Sometimes there are some racially sensitive topics that you just do not want to talk about because they're already talking about it, and their interpretation seems learned rather than truthful. And so you just don't want to talk about it at that point. (you don't want to be a part of the discussion because of the path it has taken)

AF2 (joins in) – Like, they're talking about it as if they know...they give the impression that they are most knowledgeable, when in fact it is really an impersonation!

AF1 (continues) – They speak as if they've experienced it. And, everybody looks right at you [with an expression of curiosity on their faces as to say "what do you think?"] But guess what, I don't know what to think because you've already dissected the topic without my input "maybe you should've asked first, or something." So sometimes you get put on the spot, because they feel that you're the only one that can now speak to it after they have already spoken about it. So sometimes being the odd one out is just not a pleasant feeling at all.

AF3 especially when you're in a small class, you have to talk. Me, I'm in a class of eight. You're one of the Black people in the class, and the other person's not African, maybe she's from the Caribbean. And I'm the only African the class. Then I'm the only African in the class with CA1 because we always have the same classes. So, we would be like the only Black people in the class. And then my other classes, I have one other Black person. So, our experiences are different. Because we are eight, the professor wants to ask each of us on and asks me for my perspective as an African, I'm like [surprised expression on face]

AF1 (joins in) – can I just get my perspective as a person?

AF3 (continues)- what if I don't have that experience? What if I don't have that experience as an African?

Randy – CB1, have you had any of those experiences?

CB1 well, some of my experiences while coming to this university was a struggle, as I would assume that all you guys are coming here, being a Black student. Oftentimes there is no mentorship or anything like that; you have to figure things out for yourself. In most of my classes, I was the only Black male in the class. So, a lot of times I would feel alienated, sitting by myself, no one would really want to sit around me. It was so different coming from where I came from, where it was predominantly Black, Black students in the University, transferring coming to a predominantly White [University]. Because, everyone around me, you can probably all relate we all look the same. There were fraternities, sororities and other stuff like that. But coming up here it was different; it was not that inviting so, I had to figure out a lot of stuff by myself. That's why one of the main things about the Africentric Support Group, they were vital in helping me find some things out because sometimes maybe I would go to my professors and I would not be satisfied with the answers that they would give me. Then I would come back to the Africentric support, and they would give me an answer, more satisfactory which I could take forward and take more steps, and that's so much better insight. So, that definitely helped me to get to where I am now, to be honest.

Randy - what CB1 is talking about is his perspective that is worth.... It's a goldmine of information that has helped him to go through class and school. Has any of you ever have the experience whereby information that was provided to you, although you want to believe that it's true, you still had to go and check it because it doesn't sound true... you know, material that is presented in the classroom, or a discussion that you might have had? And how does that make you feel? For instance when you found out that it's not true? What is your confidence level like in that person?

AF3 well, I'd say I had that same experience. I think that's when I went to meet you. To tell you the truth, the International Students' Office, I don't know what they call themselves, but sorry to say. They're of no help to any Black student. It's like they help a certain

group of students. That's just the truth. They're of no help to anyone. I went there to ask them questions and was even more confused when left. It is as if they're not even ready to go into details and answer your questions. It's like... [In dragging tone] [now signifying a quick answer] and then stops. I really didn't get any help from them, seriously. I didn't get any help from the International Students' Office. I don't even go there because I feel like I would get any help. I got the same impression the first time, and the second time, so, I don't bother going, why not just go to my Africentric Group, and I can meet you and ask you questions, and you go into details with me. So, it's different. And, I've had that same problem, even when I was struggling with school tuition, For instance with the exchange rate going up and I had to try figure things out, they didn't help me, so I had to go to the Africentric Group. Even though I was not part of the Africentric Group, I hadn't done anything with you guys. I felt like, I needed to ask someone like me..., you know. I'm telling you! Someone like me would understand, and that was what happened. And you understood, and I got more information from you that I've been struggling to get for the past 2 to 3 months, that I've been here struggling and running around.

AF2 Okay. I laughed when you said, "someone like me," because the first thing I noticed even on my first day here, I needed information from the registration desk, and then, I went there, and I saw all the people there. I wasn't uncomfortable talking to any of them, and then I look, and I saw...[pointing to the researcher] I saw him. So, I thought, Great! I have no idea where he was from, but the fact that he looks like me, I talk to him confidently...

Randy (cuts in) – you can call me by name... I don't mind.

... All laughs...

AF2 (continues) - yes. I went to the registration desk, and I saw someone like me, I saw Randy. I said okay, good this is a Black person I don't know why, but I just felt more comfortable, and I asked him. So, I cannot say they didn't help me; I just chose to go to just where I felt comfortable.

AF1 and, in addition to what AF3 and AF2 have said, I feel like that's just the case that speaks to the need we're diversity and inclusion and representation in these offices. I mean, if you're going to Africa or the Caribbean or even Canada to recruit students of colour to come here, and you have no services in place, and the only place you can find a person of colour to mentor you or guide you, in the Africentric Support Group. Not in the career services, not in the International Students' Office. It just makes you feel so uncomfortable because you're claiming that you're a very diverse institution, but we don't see that in the staff that we have here at the Mount.

AF3 there was no Black staff. We don't have a Black person in career services; we don't have a Black person in the International Students' Office. In all the other offices there's no Black person around.

(Group discussion about the International Students' Office)- In the International Students' Office, there's no African?...

(multiple responses) ... there is no Black person!!...

But it's the International Students' Office!!! ...

Yes, but they're all Asian. They're all Asian and White. There's no Black person there

AF3 (continues) - Career Services, there's no Black person... even at the Writing Center, there's no Black person.

AF1 and so, even for them to understand when we sometimes speak, I feel like a Black person from the Caribbean is more relatable even though we don't speak the same way, you're more open; you know that you can understand me. But, when you're speaking to a White person for the first time, for example, A Caucasian person, they just feel like, oh" maybe she's not speaking English. Like, they don't even try to understand what you're saying until you put an accent to it like I'm doing right now (adding a Canadian accent to her speech). I don't feel comfortable speaking like a proper Nigerian because even though it's clean, clear, correct English, they just feel like it's not correct" oh in their head it's like... Whoa. So, you're not comfortable speaking with that person, and that's why we tend to look around for somebody that looks like us who knows that, Okay, you know what, you might not be speaking exactly the same way, but I'm opened to understanding you because Black is a language... [signifying that we understand each other's struggle without saying a word].

AF2 so, a huge thing. I'd say a huge thing because during my final year...okay, not my final year. I worked on a thesis, and I put everything together with all the English and everything, and then I had a comment from a professor, and the remark was, "you should give your work to somebody to review for you," and well, you should give your work to.... What got me thinking was, I forgot exactly how he said it but, he was implying because of the English and when he said his statements and I thought about it, I was thought to myself" Okay" I've done four years in a university. To have been accepted here you have to show your English proficiency. For me to have done all my courses, up to this time I'm about to finish my thesis to submit, my English isn't that bad. I just think, while it might have been out of good thought, the way it just came out to me was like... well, you should give your work to be revised by someone else to go through the English for you. I was stunned!!!! And then, I just thought about it, and I remembered this person spoke to me once and, I thought to myself this is not the correct English, so what is this person talking about?

Randy – So, what I'm hearing is the devaluing of the African knowledge or the Black person's knowledge. Whether it means that you received it from a Eurocentric institution or, (and a have quotations here) " or you received it from an African institution." Has any of you ever had a situation whereby... besides AF2, whereby you were challenged to... your

work was challenged to the point where you felt as though both you and your work was devalued?

CA1 well, to speak to that I have a couple of experiences. Generally, from the professors, I think initially, they might have questioned, who is this person and maybe what do they have to say. I had one professor who, when I would speak she wouldn't do that thing where they stop, pause for a moment, and contemplate what's that noise, Oh, it's the fan, okay, so let's carry on with the real discussion. But no response to any comments that I ever made or anything like that. She just, wanted to move on quickly. And, It got to the point where somebody else in the class noticed what was going on so much, that at one point they turned to the professor and said, "CA1 raise their hands like 10 minutes ago" "CA1 raise their hands like 10 minutes ago." And, you know, and then came to me about it afterward, And I was like, well you know I kind of go by those four, take nothing personally that the professor was really saying more about themselves when they would do that and they're kind of devaluing. But, overall most of the professors I've dealt with and classes have been really great. But one class I took, it was coming from the students. I hadn't intended to take this mathematics course, because I don't have the undergrad mathematics background, but I'm at the professor, and we have a conversation about it. And the professor said, " oh, you're exactly the kind of person I want to have in this class because it'll be looking at mathematics from a curriculum side but also from a philosophical perspective of what exactly is mathematics, and you understand that." So, I took this class, everybody in the class was either high school advanced mathematics teacher, which you can read to me not many Black students in their classes, and one person who had been a Math professor at University here. And so I found whenever I would say something, they would almost be an almost overt contempt. Or dismissal of things I have to say. And, They were a couple of instances where all of a sudden the professor realized, oh! This woman actually has the knowledge, the professor realized then other people in the class realized, I have like an understanding of mathematics that isn't about numeracy. Which as you know, those are very different things. So, basically what happened was, I was talking about different ways that we come to know what we call numbers and mathematics and how we tend to... if you look at the research that is "valid," it always starts in that great place of Greece or Rome and then goes forward as though there was nothing before that. And so we were all tasked in the class with providing a section of the history of mathematics, I like shows prehistoric times... just because I could. And there was one the most contemptuous guys in the class... this is a long story... got up and he talked about Pythagoras and Pythagoras's theorem and where that came from and so forth. And when I had my turn to speak, because we were doing it in order. I talked about, just how, our traditional knowledge and how we know what you know, and he felt the need to interrupt in the middle of my presentation to start telling me that what I was talking about was not mathematics. And, I was basically challenging the notion that everything started in Greece, and that even if you actually take a moment to scratch the surface, even Pythagoras wasn't saying it all started here. Pythagoras is sort of nodding to Egypt and nodding to India, nodding to other the places. And even, you know, comes down to that Pythagoras drop down of a lowly woman, because this guy was also

misogynistic. So, he [Pythagoras] would've credited other people as well. But just that notion that every single time I would say something, even if I was doing a presentation that sort of interrupting challenging in the midst of the presentation. How was this related to mathematics? How is this related? do you have an algorithm to show for that? And that sort of behavior. And then in the end, in the class, I ended up getting a higher number than he did, and he was extremely upset about it. But the reality was, he was just a sort of ignorant guy, who, yes, you're a high school math teacher, but you really have this sort of narrow view. And he'd been credited with this narrow view, just by the fact that he was born with a certain skin colour on the right appendages in his perineal area. And this suddenly, we are in a situation where other people might speak... for him you can see that's his whole being was challenged just by the idea that this Black person would come into his class and speak, and speak about something that he knew. And that tells you how intelligent this guy was, not even intelligent enough, lack of knowledge, he didn't even understand to say well, the hour it's not... not everything is based 10. And he was like, well what do you mean? Well you've sat here, you have a computer in front of you. That's binary. There's o'clock that base 60. And he argue and argue and argued that it wasn't base 60. And I, said two hours isn't two hundred minutes, it's 120 minutes. So, this is somebody who is actually like teaching someone else mathematics, but, if I open my mouth I have nothing to say. But, it's the constant possessive act that there is that need to be right at all times and I found that not just in that class, but in a lot of other classes. That, if you try to bring something forward this is sort of devaluing of that. And that's where Afrocentricity, I think, comes into it in a really positive way. Because, when you can start something by saying, I'm rooted in this kind of believe. And it is important for the work that I'm doing has some value. Or, I'm bringing that forward, not just from my own view, as Randy is doing in his research, is this say... these are things that I already know, but I'm bringing these people around me to say,... to speak to that from different perspective... but also that sort of connectedness in it. Was that a long story?

Randy CA1, I'm glad you raised this point because what I want us to talk about next is... the value of the Africentric Support Group. What has it done for you? And, in your experience, even if it hadn't done something significant for you, you may or may not know someone that it has helped. Can you speak to that as well? It's just for us to identify our groundness, like where we're coming from, and is this research worth it? What I am doing, is it worth it? Because I'm coming from an Africentric perspective, and again the ASG is my base and my home to go to test everything that I wanted to find out for myself. So, for you, what is the ASG done in your life, or for someone else that you know?

AF1 well, for me... apart from the fact that I did work with the ASG, just the sense of belonging that it offers. Because, it puts you in the midst of the students of colour, from all sorts of... you know... from all different countries and you learn a lot about other people's culture and perspectives and life. Also, through the ASG, I did get two jobs... through the networks people that I met during the Africentric Support Group events and activities for students. And, I definitely know so many different students of colour,

mostly from Africa, who had the opportunity to volunteer and build on skills that they never even thought they had. And, also be confident enough actually to speak and network with people. Because, I find that many students of colour might be a bit shy, in terms of networking, because networking is not something that we are used to. You don't just walk up to somebody and say, "hi my name is this." But, I feel like that give the opportunity for them actually to come out of their shell. Also, the mentorship. The fact that you know there's somebody who is successful in their field that you can talk about your papers and you would actually get help from even with careers. It is so funny how a group that is "so small," can offer you such a wide range of services when there are actually departments in the University who should be doing that but cannot do that effectively, just because of the lack of representation and diversity in the offices.

AF2 I would speak to that. So, I did some work with the ASG, but I think the most valuable one that I can think about is my experiences I had with other students, where they would come to me with a paper or an assignment they had to do. It was later, after meeting them that I actually realized, I think after one of our discussions I actually found out that there's a department for that. But, this girl told me, no, she doesn't feel comfortable there. So, in addition to my work, I had to take my time to assist, and I realized that she was in a different discipline I'm doing science, but she's business or something like that. The fact that I could explain it in a manner she can understand, like familiar ground and how to construct to make it presentable. Because, she had really great ideas, but how to make it presentable does this person, who is not from my culture, that's a skill I think that's a huge thing. Because, you can have valuable points, but if you're not presenting it in a way that is appealing to this person of this culture, then they cannot relate to it, right? So, I found that that was really helpful. And, the feeling of, they are people like me around, I will pull that up anytime, because, I stayed in resident for a year and there were times that I would eat and, virtually we can eat anything. So, they said you eat anything, and I responded I'm not eating because I'm enjoying, I just have to feel my tummy. We are just... and, it felt good to know that... okay, it's not just me that feels this way when we start talking about. Okay, so I'm not the only one who doesn't like this kind of food, right. So, it's very supporting in..., I remember we had an activity where we actually did the jollof thing. For me, it wasn't just the competition part, but the fact that students from different walks of life, different countries, we can come together and eat food that we talk about. Like..., we just meet together and talk, and have a good time together. I think that that helps, and we might see that... oh, when we're thinking about academics it's just in class, but, we all know as of well... very well... that all these things help you get ready to work on your academics. Because if you don't, feeling lonely... you're not going to get too far.

AF1 and I feel like the Africentric Support Group is like..., the only group that identifies the fact that people of colour need help. Not help as in..., I mean... we need... we need to be as social beings, and so there needs a group of activities and events that are targeted at students of colour to help bring them together and help them socialize. Because if you..., you know how they say... like in the news in the US, when there's a 12-year-old Black

boy, they look at him as somebody that is an adult and treat him as such because they feel like he's dangerous. It's like, we are seen as people who... I mean... just throw them in there, they're fine, they don't need any... you know..., Black people don't get depressed anyway, ... right? So, they don't need any mental or social activities to keep them going, and keep them... like..., we just come here and then... there you are, start studying... Moodle.... that's it. There is no..., other than the Africentric Support Group; there's no other source of support for students of African descent. And, for of school this big, That's a shame!

CB1 I definitely agree with AF2 and with AF1. The group definitely gave me a lot of insight, so that... whereas, I remember one class that I did not pass; I failed it with a 1%. And, it was after that semester I found out that some students they went and got to retake the test by going to the teacher. The teacher was Caucasian, and he was...uhm... I felt like he was kind of racist, so I never really went to him. But, I remember that I went to Randy because I know... I trusted him, and he gave me insight about... you know... I could've taken the test again... you know... I could've gone, and I could've petitioned and stuff like that. You know, stuff that I didn't even know... you know... but plain right didn't even know. And, I didn't feel comfortable going to the teacher, so that was one thing, and another thing what AF2 said is...uhm... having experiences with other Black people... you know... being able to share experiences with others... with people that look like me, definitely help with a lot of homework, a lot of social skills... you know... getting together with some people and doing activities and definitely, having a presence on campus, because you need that, to have that presence on campus. You know, as I said... there're no fraternities, or sororities or anything like that here. So, having a place we are people of different Africentric groups could come together and socialize, and just not have to... not have to... like... adhere or be standardized to speak a certain way or anything like that. I think that is... that's definitely something that we need... you know... and keep that going on.

CA1 I would agree with what you're saying CB1, AF1, AF2, AF3, Randy...

... All Laughs....

CA1 (continues) - I would say that you know, again, just the sort of reiterate some of the points that were made at about the need for mentorship, and the... you know this is... you know again... these are the things... I'm going back to the question, "what does the Africentric Group give?" it's that sort of mentorship, I know for myself, when I first came I wasn't intending on doing a degree, I just wanted to do one particular course. And when I came and asked for information about it, again... there is that... people at the registration office... lovely, but again you know, I was born and raised in eastern Canada, so it's not that I don't speak their vernacular, I do. But, it's like, when they speak it's like I don't really... somehow, I don't really understand what you're saying to me, somehow, I'm missing that. And, Randy's intervention is what ended up really pulling me into this school. So, there's that sort of mentorship at that reflection somebody who looks like me that I'm going to ask him questions that I might not, ... I may have asked one or two

questions initially. And it was like... I'm really not sure what this person is saying to me, then I connected with Randy, and I feel like the Africentric Support Group then become this liaison between Black or students of African descent and the University. And that Randy, or the person who would be in that role, if the university allows the Africentric Support Group to be able to have the support and flourish... that person would then be like a translator of the system into, as AF2 was saying, that you were acting in that role for another student informally. What I like is that the Africentric Support Group has done that, but it has also given many of us in this room opportunities to see that we also have those skills. We can bring the different skills we have forward because there is in that sense of mentorship. And all of this goes back to the lack of those things, for me goes back to, again those destabilizing forces that aren't overt at all the time, most of the times they are somewhat subversive, but we feel them. And, there was a mom that I was talking to the other day, her daughters are now grown and just finishing university, she's a White woman and has biracial children with an African man, and what she was asking me about my son who seven, and how is school journey has been. She said to me something that is really stuck with me; she said, "Beware the chill of cold tolerance." And it was such a powerful statement, because, that for me really sums up some of the things that we're also speaking about in this room. It's not that anybody is walking up to us and saying, "you don't belong here AF2" Or nobody is going to...or right now...say that to you. Because again, we are in Canada, Canada has the caste system, whether we wanted to acknowledge that or not. Canada has a subtle... you know... a more British of that class or caste system, versus the United States... you know... people talk about whether there is more racism in the states or Canada. That to me is a miss... you know... sort of a you have missed the point of the argument it's not whether one is more or less, are which is worse, it's how does it manifest. In Canada, it manifests itself in this class system, which is to say well, you know... "AF3 is welcome, because AF3 is coming with these things, but maybe Randy isn't welcome because Randy isn't coming with these other things." And, those things are always ever-shifting. To Go back to what Randy's question was... you know... certain things you hear from one person who tells you this, then another person tells you something else. And again, they all appear on the surface to be wanting to be helpful, but that the day, those being misdirected can really sort of put a student of course. Without the is ASG the rudder in the back of the boat, no we're going in this direction, and Randy is standing up in front with the lamp, going, "don't keep going that way." I know I wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation. Because of this university... and it's not just this university... to go back to something else that Randy said in the beginning about how this university is an opportunity because of its size to move forward with something. There are other universities that don't even allow this to happen, and I don't know how we get the university to acknowledge that Black and students of African descent are coming in with a whole bunch of other stuff that we're also working on. So, we're not, "lazy students." We have to do all these extra things that the university doesn't acknowledge. Whether it's having to find ways to get together to create our own social experiences so that we can survive, as you said, not get depressed... or you know... not be isolated, and all of those kinds of things. There's no

sort of acknowledgment of that, or for myself, I've done art projects every term. I've taken on major art projects that I've never gotten credit for. So, while I'm doing this coursework, I'm also doing all this research and doing art projects because the art projects help me survive. Being able to go through very... what was it that mother said? "The chill of a cold tolerance." So, I hope that we can as a group, somehow committed to keep pushing forward that there really needs to be not just one person who ends up being the Coordinator, if that person has to drive and the family support behind them to give their entire life to a position that is quarter time.... Well it is!!! It's a quarter-time of what it should be, right. And then, somebody else is now coming along to do that, and we hope that that person will survive and be able to do a full-time job in quarter-time. Somehow, we need... hopefully this research will provide that opportunity... because the ASG is too important to like, just fizzle out, because one person isn't there.

Randy CA1, I just want to thank you for that part of it, you know... I always try to lead on from your discussion, because it sounds really great. And...uhm... not that the rest of you don't sound great... but, you [CA1] always touch on a different point that I feel as though I should head in that direction. Ok now let me take my foot out of my mouth. So, could you talk about some of the actions that occurred, possibly in the classroom, possibly in the dining hall, that really affected you, whether it was academically, socially. How did it affect your life? We just spoke about how the ASG really brought things together for you. Let's talk about when you leave the ASG, who are some of these people that are trying to pull you apart... and pull your conscience and your "self"- (the person you know) apart?

AF3 the worst thing for a Black person, is when you're striving to be visible, and you feel invisible. There are so many people around you, but it's like you're still invisible. And, part of what I'm writing my thesis on, because you know I'm writing an autobiography on ways of learning, or Black identity... as a Black person coming to Canada and experiencing an entirely new side of life, from what I'm used to. So, I've had dozens of the experience, whereby, I am conscious of myself. I don't know why. Like, example, I enter a store, and my hands are in my pocket, I take them out, unconsciously. I'm scared that someone might think I put something in my pocket. And then I'm walking down the store, and someone is staring at me... you know, checking if maybe I... you know, I get that all the time. Like, this passive-aggressive attitude, it's not right, or something I should get used to. But, I actually..., it annoys me, I don't know what to do about it. I mean, why are you judging me based on my skin? You're the one with the problem, not me because I'm not judging you, I'm not... you know, trying to.... I'm always conscious of myself anytime I'm somewhere, especially where if I'm alone...--... I'm the only Black person in the room. And, there's nobody there that looks like me that can defend me or help me out when, you know. So, it's something I go through every day, in trying to... I don't know; it's difficult. I don't know how to explain it... so, it's something I experience every day. Like people smiling at you and say "hello" ...(signaling that the unwelcoming smile doesn't last long). You're like, "fake... fake"

CA1 I called that, “ Nice.. Nice”

AF1 well, I can totally relate.

AF3 like, even in school. Like, you are in school, it’s supposed to be a different experience. When I came here, I thought, oh... I’ll make lots of friends with different people. Because I’ve always been someone who likes to learn from other people. It doesn’t have to be a Black person, you can be Chinese, you can be Korean, you can be White, or whatever race you are. But coming here, I didn’t have that experience. Like, everyone... there’s this community. Everyone is on his or her own. The Chinese people are together; they have that wall around them, no one can penetrate. You have the White Caucasian together; it’s not all of them are like that. Then you have the Arabs together, and then you have some Blacks. The Caribbean together, then you have to Nigerians together, you have to Ghanaians... you know. That kind of thing... you can’t even burst the bubble to like... “excuse me, hello.” And, I’m someone, I find it difficult to... it’s not like... I’m not shy, I’m not a snob, but the fact that I fear rejection. Like,... talking to you and then you’re like, “ excuse me!!” and then turns away... that’s my fear. It scares me, the fact... rejection, when I “ hello” I’m trying to make friends with you and then you’re like... snob me... and like that, it scares me.

Randy - that’s a good point.

AF1 yeah. And, I can definitely relate that, especially seeing the university which you travel... probably traveled halfway around the world to attend and knowing that, coming from outside, where you’re being called the “N” word... I’ve experienced that. Walking on the street and somebody in their car just screaming the “N” word at me. And, knowing that when you go to the university it’s not much of a different experience, it’s not a safe haven. You came here, you spent all this money... you’re spending three times the amount that a domestic student is spending, but it’s still not safe for you. I’ve had experiences in school with students and professor, like... what you said about rejection, I’m not the shy person either, but I find myself just sticking to myself because I don’t want somebody to come and disrespect me... you know. So, even when a professor says, split yourselves into groups for this project... you know ... they all go into their normal groups. You’re just here like,... “Okay!” You’re an international student, you’re an international student... let’s make a group. And, all of the groups that have been are all made up of international students. All Arab, because I’m usually the only person of colour in the class, I was the only Black person in my class. So, I end up just being in a group with Arab students in all my courses. And so, those are the only people I get the bounce ideas off, I don’t get the bounce ideas off... you know..., a different category of people all the time. And, that tells on my grades, on all our grades. I don’t know if it’s on purpose, but many of my classes, all international students have the same grade. Like... we share each other’s grades [speak openly about each other’s grades], because we know that it’s going to be the same. What did you get... what did you get? [talking about grades]. And we all know that it’s going to be the same, no matter how much effort you put. Even if it’s not a group work, you’re just going to have the same grade. It happens

seven times out of ten, and it's not a coincidence. I have... I'm one to challenge my grade. So, I've challenged a few professors, and I've had one professor tell me, "AF1, you know, maybe you're just used to have in high grades"...

...All Laughs...

AF1 (continues) - ... I was like, what? What do you mean? Because I was confident enough to challenge the notes..., I don't think her notes were for my paper, because it's like she never even went through it. You asked for 15 items to be listed and explained... you ask for 12 items, I give you 15... minimum of 12, so you can go above that, right? So, I gave you 15 items, and in your notes, you're telling me that I don't have up to the stipulated 12, and I tell you to turn your page and you're like, oh... okay. And you're reading through it, looking for something else to say. That's not okay, so don't tell me that it's because I'm used to having a high grade, because obviously, you didn't go through my paper. And so, that was something that destabilized me... like, oh wait, I've heard this from other students, I never thought it would happen to me because first of all, I'm in the Master's program, and I expect that everybody is mature enough to, you know, as a professor teaching a graduate course, I feel like you must've gone through a certain process to get to that stage, and I didn't think it would ever happen to me. But I was like, Oh WOW!!! Maybe I'm just used to having high grades, so what. back home they just give me high grades, not because I deserve it, but because the standard is just low, and I'm here just because of what...? So, that was something that really... that made me upset, and that made me challenge every grade I got with every other professor. And, I started feeling like the angry Black woman, but I took the chance anyway. Because that happened to me before already, so. She ended up changing my grade, but many students what probably not challenge.

AF3 funny thing, I never had that experience with any of my professors. Like... they gave me the grades, like..., I know those grades I deserve them. You understand, I never had that experience.

CA1 (joins in) – well, I can think of two of the professors you've had. And at least one of them you have for more than one course, and we met in a course together. And that the indigenous knowledge course, again, I've taken courses and I've, in every... I've been interpreting for more than 20 years, and every year I interpret at least one course... that is the best instructor that I have come across. Because that person made an effort to make sure that they saw and acknowledged every person in the room. And, honestly saw them, saw who they were, what they bring, you know..., again, bringing it back to the ASG, that is also the similar kind of thing. And that comes from a basis of, that is an indigenous way of being in the world, whether it's indigenous as in Aboriginal or as indigenous as in "Afro-indigenous kind of way of... you know... you see the person and the story that they bring. That's why... that's... you know, if we're truly looking at it from an Africentric perspective, we see the person and the story that they bring. And that professor was truly..., her class was rooted in this indigenous perspective, starting from the very first night and said, "my expertise is, I will speak about indigeneity as a

Mi'kmaq person." You know, with that sort of, those standing on the shoulders of my ancestors, what I want to acknowledge it from the first night the professor looked at AF3 and said, "I realize that you're coming from the continent, the basis of indigeneity. I see you, CA1, and I know that you're also bringing, you know, another indigenous perspective." Name, you know, just as name people in the class and it said, "but I will speak from my place, and I would like... not oh, okay. Now AF1, you will now represent everybody from your country." No, it was, I acknowledge you, I see you, I see that you come with a story. Those stories are welcome, but you don't have to share that stories. I spent the first six weeks... I cried for almost every class. Just because it was so wonderful to have somebody who was literally saying, okay, you have value, I see you as more than just what it says that I expect from you on this course outline handling bring me any of that other stuff. Right, that professor was, no, bring that, and was also welcoming, bringing elders from other places, bringing people, every week there was somebody who came and spoke and shared. And again, that's what the ASG gives us; it's the opportunity not just to be lost in our own story. We get to sit around with each other; we get through Randy as the coordinator, we get to realize that, oh we're not the only ones! So, it was Randy who was telling me, "oh no--no--no, I want to introduce you to this person, because maybe you have something to help support them, or maybe I want to introduce you to this person so that they can support you." You know.

Randy - I do want to respect your time. I did say this discussion will go for two hours, it is now 6 o'clock, but I don't want to leave the room knowing that you had something else to share. I can leave the floor open for you to provide your final thoughts, just take into account that you will all get the opportunity to have that personal time with me to discuss in depth what your experience is at MSVU.

AF2 just a funny..., funny thing that happened in my lab one of the days. So, we're taking a picture of and equipment and wanted the students to be around, and of course, I'm the only African. So, we took the picture, like..., that guy who took it, there was... okay, I don't know if it was the...like the position of the room. So obviously I am Black, so I was literally not showing in the picture, like other White people... so I was Black in there. And then he went like... "oh, we might have to retake the picture because I can't see AF2 [used name accidentally it was replaced by pseudonym]. And well, like...,I understand, because where we were taking it, the shade was there and I'm Black too, so everybody else was White, and I'm virtually not there and my hair this Black...so. And, when he said that I realized someone was like, "oh, no no no no, it should be fine" like... So, I realize what I got from that it is, why are we putting ourselves in this awkward moment. So went the guy was like, I can't see AF2 [used name accidentally it was replaced by pseudonym], obviously, it's coming from a place like..., let's take it at the different angle because AF2 [used name accidentally it was replaced by pseudonym] is all Black, and we can see her. He didn't say AF2 [used name accidentally it was replaced by pseudonym] is all Black, but I'm just thinking that...

All amazed and started chattering.

AF2 (continues)... let's retake the picture, AF2 cannot be seen. But the way the other student reacted, I was like... this is quite making it uncomfortable for me. Did not realize it, so the student who spoke again was trying to make it sound like, "he's Not saying you're Black, you can't be seen in the picture, he's just trying to say that we should take it at a different angle." It's like, I don't care I understand, I take pictures, and I don't like how I look, or, I can't see... yeah, the lighting perfect. I just think that there're times where too... I've been in positions where everyone else is like..., to alert of the racism thing, so it kind of makes it uncomfortable for everybody. You're not trying to be racist, but you're making it so tense that that makes us very uncomfortable.

AF1 Okay! So, I was just going to mention that something as little as I'm named can determine how students of colour feel throughout their... an entire class. And, I'm sure we all can relate. We have some overzealous professors, who, want to take it upon themselves as a challenge to play the, "I can pronounce it" for the hundred times... I mean... Both of us are from Africa [pointing to another participant], but I'm from a different group of people, in a different country, so even she won't be able to pronounce my full name. So, when I tell you, say for example my name is "Folashadey," and I tell you just "Fola" is fine, please accept that "Fola" is fine. If we are in a room separately, and you want a lesson, that's not a problem, I'll have enough to supply you with that service. But, if every single time in a class you tried to pronounce my full name all the time, when I've told you over and over that just a simple part of it is fine, it makes me feel like a stranger every single time, even though we've had classes for eight weeks. It feels like you still don't... just don't know my name, meanwhile you could have avoided me... you could've avoided me feeling like that just by saying 'Fola" instead of "Folashadey".... Folashdie...Folaaaa.... Like, just don't because it makes me feel very awkward and it makes everybody uncomfortable, I think. Yeah, that's it.

CA1 So, you're asking for wrapping out comments?

Randy - anything you'd like to talk about.

CA1 first of all, I'd like to say I'm thankful for the opportunity to spend this time, I mean... you know, everybody has a pile of other things to do, but it's nice to just sit in a room with people who look like me, share food and so that's a powerful thing. I'm looking forward to the research when it comes out; I'd like to sit and talk to you more about stuff. I'd like to maybe just know from here when we leave today, so, what happens next, because I think pretty much everybody else in the room is graduation... there's three of us who graduated, and Three of us haven't, right? So, how do we stay connected, what happens next, how to be continued to move this forward. And again, thank you.

AF3 about the name thing, it's like everyone insists on calling me CA1 [used name accidentally it was replaced by pseudonym]... even when... sorry, they insist on calling my real name even when they pronounce it badly Horribly!. Like, sometimes I'm cringing.... Just use my English name. (dragging her words) No-ooo, I want to call you

by your Nigerian name, and I'm like, but you can't pronounce it well. I think the Africentric Group is good for the Black students, and we need to make it stronger. It doesn't have to end when you leave. If Randy leaves there, we need someone to make it bigger, and really for us to start with students during orientation. I wish that would be possible, I wish I could... like if I could work with the Africentric group... I have so many ideas. From the orientation, it should be promoted that we have an Africentric Group and if you need any help you should see us. Because, even, there're some Black students in the school that doesn't, I don't know... they have this idea, they don't like to associate with the Africentric Group. Even I tried to tell them like... it's good, go to Randy, ask questions, if you need any help just go to him. You know, he would give you a lot of information that other people might not tell you, because they don't want you to know... you understand. No, it's the truth, because they don't want you to know. So, I think it's important... let's start from orientation. I mean, you get a lot of Black students who come in for the first time, let them know that there's a group for them. If they need help they don't have to join, they don't have to come to us to fill a form to join. But, you know..., if you need help come to us. So, I think that should be to start, but I just hope that the group gets stronger and better.

AF2 I think that would reduce the culture shock... when they come in.

AF3 yes! When they come in.

CB1 so, just some of my wrapping up comments would be to future ASG members or any person of the Africentric community, who is coming to the Mount. Just some things, just...uhm... be encouraged, stay focused, always try to find a diverse group of friends... speak out if you're uncomfortable, say something if you're uncomfortable..., that's a big thing. You always want to give back, yeah, that's some of the key things that kept me... kept me sane while attending university, you know. Other than the fact that the ASG was here to help me, just some of those key things that I kept myself, get me going along and now I am done.

CA1 AF3 said that the Africentric Support Group was good for Black students, and I agree, but I actually think based on comments by AF2 and AF1, and my own experiences as well, it actually is good for all students. Because, if we don't feel comfortable or safe to speak up in our classes, then the entire University misses out on our contribution in the time that we are here... so I just want to... not to disagree with you, but to sort of speak of the groups' benefit, not just to the people who come to the group.

Randy I did say earlier that CA1 always ends with a big BANG.

...All Laughs...

Randy I really want to thank you all for coming out this evening. And like I said, it's really hard to pull people together in the middle of the week to do something like this, so I really appreciate it. For as much as you have gained from the ASG and from me personally, I have to tell you that when Africentricity is employed you will realize that, I

was equally benefiting from your input. in the true sense of Africentricity, if you think that you can do this on your own, you're wrong. Because, I really did rely heavily on each one of you, I relied on the contribution that you brought. When I came to you and say, "one of the students has problems with their academics, can you assist" and you stepped in to help. We were more or less a group of people coming together and saying, "yeah, I can help, or she can help." And, where I came in, as the Coordination, is just knowing the strengths of everyone. I never doubt any Black students that they can or can't do anything. If they say they can't do it, I tend to show them that they can with the support of the ASG. But, I did rely heavily on your knowledge and what you've brought to the ASG, and moreover to the university. Had it not been for your background and your knowledge and your willingness to take on the tasks that the ASG has thrown at you, we wouldn't have gotten this far. And I said we, because it is you, who made the ASG the success that it is today. So, I want to thank you, and as we go through this research, I'm sure that you have lots more to add. And...uhm... this research is for me, as much as it's yours... we will all be proud of the end results.

So, thank you for contributing to this work.