

PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF RAISING HEALTHY BLACK CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

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The early learning environment is important in the development of racial identity for Black and bi-racial children as this may be the first environment outside of the children's home environment where they learn about themselves and others. Through semi-structured interviews this qualitative research explores five Black Canadian mothers' racial socialization practices and perceptions of how their children's racial identity is being represented in the early learning environment. Employing a constructivist framework and Critical Race Theory (CRT) four overarching themes were identified: "racial socialization behaviours connected to Black identity", "parents using racial socialization to combat racism", "lack of resources supporting racial identity", and "diversity of teachers, authority belongs to everybody". The mothers in this study employed racial socialization behaviours to buffer against the impact of racism in order to support the healthy development of their children.

Keywords: racial socialization, Critical race theory, racism, early learning environment

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wonderful children to Adalia Hall, Hannah Hall and Caleb Hall. I hope to lay a foundation for you all that leads to success. May you always remember that you are beautiful, intelligent, and important.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The first Black people who lived in Canada were slaves, who were brought here by the French in the 17th century (Little, Vyain, Scaramuzzo, Cody-Rydzewski, Griffiths, Strayer, Keirns & McGivern, 2014). While slavery was a common practice in the United States and the British Empire, the practice was not widespread throughout Canada as the economic conditions in Canada were unfavorable to sustain this practice (Little et al., 2014). Thus, the practice of slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire and Canada in 1834 and as such, Canada became the place of refuge for slaves who were fleeing from slavery in the United States (Little et al., 2014). Even though slavery was banned or illegal in Canada, and on paper Black Canadians had the same equal rights as their white counterparts, they encountered strong opposition to freely exercise those rights because of prejudice and stereotypical views held by the dominant group about the escaping slaves and the Black Loyalists at that time (Little et al., 2014).

A hundred years or so later, Canada's immigration policy in the late 1960s 'welcomed' Blacks from the African diaspora who were brought in as refugees, cheap laborers, working in low paying unskilled dead-end jobs, which were and remain racially and gender segmented (Brickner & Straehle, 2010; Calliste, 2003; Little et al., 2014). Therefore, the history of Blacks in Canada has been the narrative of oppression, as Blacks were and are marginalized and continue to occupy a subordinate role in Canadian society (Calliste, 2003). Given this context, it is not surprising that parents of Black and bi-racial children in Canada, as well as the United States, engage in what researchers refer to as racial socialization, a type of socialization which is said to play an important role in the positive development of Black children's racial self-concept (Brega & Coleman, 1999; Caughy, Nettles & Lima, 2011). Racial socialization, also known as ethnic-

racial socialization can be defined as the verbal and non-verbal messages that parents transmit to their children regarding race, including beliefs, attitudes and values (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Lesane-Brown, 2006).

In her review of race socialization in Black American families, Lesane-Brown, (2006) reports that parents' racial socialization of their children buffers against discrimination and racism that their children go through as a result of their social position in society. Racial socialization helps Black and bi-racial children to understand Black culture and to interact with other cultures, as well as to navigate and cope with being part of an oppressed group in society. Indeed, many studies, primarily conducted in the United States, have demonstrated that Black parents' racial socialization of their children contributes to better academic outcomes, and promotes self-esteem (Hughes et al., 2011; Nebllette et al., 2009; Suizzo et al., 2008; Wang & Huguley, 2012). At the same time, while these studies have not investigated if parents socialized their children aiming for a particular outcome, these studies do suggest factors that may influence racial socialization messages. These factors include, parents age, gender, socio-economic status, neighbourhood, education, children's characteristics and parents own experiences of racism (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Thronton et al., 1990).

Ramsey (2009), a prominent developmental psychologist who studied children and racial identity, reminds us that as early as the preschool years, children are developing their racial identity. Thus, along with parents, the early learning environment is critical in the development of children's self-concept, self-esteem, racial attitudes and identity (Fargo, Sanders & Gaias, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that early childhood educators intentionally teach children about observable physical differences associated with race such as hair textures and skin colour (Kemple, Lee & Harris, 2016). Furthermore, Brown, Souto-Manning and Laman, (2010) argue,

since children are developing their racial identity as early as the preschool years, educators in the early childhood environment have to closely monitor classroom practices that alienate, silence or dismiss issues that children encounter regarding race and status. Unfortunately, many early childhood educators believe that children in the early learning environment are too young to engage in conversations about race (Fargo et al., 2015; Husband, 2010). Environments that do not support children's racial identity lead to Black and bi-racial children being placed in remedial classes and teachers having a lower expectation of their ability to succeed in school (Wang & Huguley, 2012). Similarly, these trends can be seen in post-secondary education, as noted by Fisher, Wallace, Fenton (2000) who found that African Americans reported that they have been discouraged from taking advanced classes, received lower grades in school because of their skin colour and were subjected to harsher punishment than other minority groups.

While the majority of the literature on racial socialization is conducted in the United States, as stated previously, Blacks in Canada also deal with racism and discrimination and many Black parents in Canada also share their concerns about raising their racialized children in this country (Calliste, 2003). Lalonde, Jones and Stroink (as cited in Dion & Kawakami, 1996), observed that in a large study done in Toronto, Blacks perceived that they had a disproportionate level of discrimination directed towards their group or towards themselves, more so than other minority groups. This is further exemplified by Jones and Stroink (as cited in Milan & Tran, 2004) who reported that the unemployment rate for Blacks in Canada is higher, and they are paid lower wages and salaries in comparison to other minority groups. In addition, they are subjected to higher levels of policing or surveillance known as racial profiling and many Blacks reported that they have been stopped by police, for no other reasons than just being Black (Cole, 2015). Recent statistics released by the Toronto District School Board revealed Black students (along

with Aboriginal students) are expelled in disproportionate numbers compared to their white counterparts in Toronto High Schools (Rankin, Rushawy & Brown, 2013). Although, Blacks in Canada legally have equal rights as any other group, they are still not treated equally under the law.

Purpose

The purpose of this small scale qualitative study is to bring awareness to how parents of Black and bi-racial children in a small city outside Toronto racially socialize their children, which according to the research cited previously, is said to support their children's cognitive, emotional and social development and as a way to counter the effects of the negative messages transmitted to them by society. A second purpose is to understand these parents' perceptions of how their child's early learning environment supports their child's racial identity. Ultimately, I hope to make some preliminary recommendations regarding the exchange of information between the home environment and the early learning environment in order to engage in and facilitate practices that better support Black and bi-racial children developing positive attitudes about their race and themselves.

This study may give parents of Black and bi-racial children a voice and ultimately greater input regarding how they see their children's racial identity being valued, encouraged, talked about and celebrated in the early learning environment. The theoretical framework guiding this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which includes tenets such as the rejection of colour blindness, the assertion that racism occurs in everyday situations, and that race is a social construction of society (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2012). Thus, this study draws on CRT as it seeks to examine racial socialization messages of parents in buffering against the negative effect of racism that their children will encounter. There is one recent study conducted in the

United States that explored how African American parents' experiences of racism and their social class influenced the kinds of messages that they transmitted to their preschooler, such as, preparation for bias and egalitarian messages (Doucet, Banerjee & Parade, 2016). However, to the best of my knowledge, there are no studies in the literature that examine parents' perceptions of how their children's racial identity is represented in the early learning environment in the Canadian context. For the purpose of this study, the early learning environment is defined as a government licensed environment that provides care to young children from birth to 6 years old for six or more hours in a day. This study fills a gap in the literature by investigating the racial messages that parents pass on to their children to support their development and how they perceive these messages reflected or not in their child's early environment in a Canadian context.

Research Questions

- 1) Do the parents in this study employ racial socialization practices, and if so what is it that they do, and why?
- (2) What are parents of Black and bi-racial children's perceptions about how their children's racial identity is being represented in the early learning environment?

Constructivist Paradigm

When conducting research in the social sciences there are several paradigms that are commonly used, which researchers can employ based upon the nature of their research. One such paradigm is positivism; a way of viewing the nature of reality as being measureable and observable; where phenomena can be quantified and studied using hypotheses that are tested (Williamson, 2006). Another is the interpretive paradigm; an umbrella term in which many different paradigms fit, "all concerned with the meanings and experiences of human beings" (p.84). This is where the constructivist paradigm fits; the nature of reality is seen through a

different lens, in that human beings interpret and reconstruct the world around them that is always changing (Williamson, 2006). According to Creswell (2014) an assumption of constructivists is that “human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world they are interpreting and meaning is constructed based on their historical and social perspectives” (p. 9). Chohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) note that a constructivist paradigm seeks to “understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within” (p.22).

As I seek to understand how parents of Black and bi-racial children racially socialize their children and to understand their unique experiences in the early learning environments, a constructivist paradigm will allow me to understand their interpretations of both of these issues, in addition to exploring how they perceive racism and discrimination in the world around them. A paradigm is an important part of the research process as it influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory looks at how societal systems are formed and how these systems are embedded with racial ideologies that perpetuate the unfair treatment of different marginalized groups. Hernandez (2016) explains that, “Critical race theory’s central focus is to uncover how racism is perpetuated. Its roots are in critical legal studies, where it sought to challenge the invisible, embedded ways that power and privilege are perpetuated in the legal system” (p.169). Yosso (2005) defines critical race theory as “as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impacts educational structures, practices, and discourses” (p.74). According to Delgado, Stefancic and Harris (2012) “racism is not easy to cure or address because it is not acknowledged and we cover ourselves under the blanket of being colour blind,

in having rules that call for everyone to be treated the same, which leads to addressing only the most blatant forms of discrimination or racism” (p. 8). Furthermore, Connolly (2000) explained that racism is not easily defined, and the boundaries or lines of demarcation that clearly define “us” versus “them” are constantly changing. So through the lens of CRT, the systems that are set up in society are there to reinforce and maintain the dominant culture’s power.

Delgado, Stefancic and Harris (2012) explain further that according to this framework, “race and races” are products of social thought and relations Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p.8). For example, the early learning environment could play a crucial role in developing Black and biracial children’s racial identity by empowering children who are not of the dominant culture to resist society’s subtle forms of oppression against minority groups and engaging children in conversations about race. Furthermore, ignoring children’s curiosity about race and differences is to convey to young children that some people are “other” and they are not worth talking about. Critical race theory challenges racism in our everyday practices because racism is so ingrained that we fail to recognize it and it becomes normalized.

Social Location

I am a Black mother of three Black children and my own experiences are a lens through which this study will be viewed. I first heard about Critical Race Theory in graduate school when my professor stood in front of the class and began to discuss race and as she explained and analyzed the plight of Blacks and discussed the works of many scholars on race and racism, I felt ashamed that I did not know much about the issues that Blacks in Canada encounter on a daily basis. I asked myself, why do I not know more about issues facing Blacks? As I began to reflect

on my childhood, I realized that my mother never discussed race and racism explicitly at home. In fact, as a child growing up, I did not read books about the plight or accomplishments of Black people, nor did I possess Black dolls or have any artifacts in the home that reinforced Black pride. Growing up in a religious household shaped the messages that my mother conveyed about race.

My mother taught me that all men and women, regardless of race, are equal in the sight of God, and she explained that our destinies are not controlled by external forces, structures or barriers, but by God's will and his plan for our individual lives. Because of my mother not explicitly discussing race or Black issues, and nor did the school system, I grew up ignorant of many of the issues facing Blacks, because I myself was not directly affected by them. I am an early childhood educator, and I asked myself before embarking on this research, am I comfortable talking about race with young children? To my surprise, the answer was no. I believed that race or racism was not an appropriate subject to discuss with children. After reading many articles for this research project, I can say that I am now comfortable engaging children in conversations about race. I have three children eleven, nine and seven and I have started having positive conversations with them about race. My educational journey has led me up to this point, where I have a desire to study Black and bi-racial children's racial identity in the early learning environment.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the research done on how parents of Black and bi-racial children racially socialize their children beginning at an early age in order to buffer against racism and discrimination, and to highlight gaps in the literature regarding the experiences of Blacks living in Canada. The literature review serves as a backdrop in showing

the need for early learning environments to work collaboratively with parents so that the positive messages about the children's race that parents are transmitting to their children will also be reinforced in the early learning environment. This literature review will cover some of the major themes around racial socialization or ethnic socialization messages in the social science literature, which include racial socialization messages, racial identity, and differences in gender in racial socialization messages.

Racial Socialization Messages

Parents communicate racial messages to their children in different ways, through verbal and non-verbal forms of transmission (Lesane-Brown, 2006). The most common messages that parents pass on to their children are of racial pride, racial barrier messages, egalitarian messages, self-worth and cultural messages, silence about race and socialization behaviours such as buying race related artifacts (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006; Lalonde et al., 2008; Neblett et al., 2009; Suizzo et al., 2008; Wang & Huguley, 2012). An American study conducted by Doucet, Banerjee and Parade (2016) revealed that egalitarian messages, which included emphasizing to children similarities across race and sharing personal stories about racism, were some of the most common messages transmitted to their preschool children.

While it is well documented that many Black parents pass on race socialization messages to their children, the ways in which these messages are passed on to children have been found to vary with the age of the child, and as their cognitive abilities and experiences develop (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Some parents recognize racial socialization as an important part of their children's development (Lalonde et al., 2008; Suizzo et al., 2008), whereas, other parents may not overtly engage in racial socialization because they are concerned about the harsh realities of racism and discrimination, as well as the discomfort experienced in bringing up conversations

about race with their children (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Rollins & Hunter, 2013). The “silent approach” (Rollins & Hunter, 2013, p. 143) is one strategy that some parents utilize where messages about race are not intentionally or overtly taught (Rollins & Hunter, 2013).

Some parents may choose to take the silent approach about race, believing that teaching their children about life skills is more important than children learning about their racial status in society (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Rollins & Hunter, 2013). Hughes et al. (2006) noted that silence about race is just as powerful as overtly discussing race. However, silence as a strategy can be very problematic for bi-racial children as they are developing their knowledge and understanding about race (Rollins & Hunter, 2013). Indeed, an American study conducted by Rollins and Hunter (2013) reported that parents of bi-racial children who do not have Black heritage were more likely to engage in silence as a racial strategy than parents of bi-racial children who have Black heritage. Lesanne-Brown (as cited in Thornton et al. 1990) noted some of the reasons why American parents of Black children may not overtly transmit racial messages to their children includes the parents having internalized negative messages that society displays about Blacks and in turn, they do not see the need to buffer against these negative messages. Another reason is that parents may feel that racially socializing their children could cause more harm than good because it could cause their children to become angry or resentful. Lastly, parents may feel that racism is an issue of the past and the need to transmit racial messages to their children is no longer warranted. While this may be the case for some parents, many Black parents overtly convey messages about race to their children.

“Overt messages” (Rollins & Hunter, 2013, p. 143) involve the direct teaching or instruction that parents provide to their children about race such as deliberate conversations about race, modeling cultural behaviours, buying cultural artifacts and exposing children to

particular environments (Brega & Coleman, 1999; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Suizzo et al., 2008) In the literature, overt messages are also referred to as “direct instructions” (Brega & Coleman, p.226) or “explicit messages” (Lesane-Brown, p.404) parents transmit to their children about race. Research conducted about overt racial socialization messages that parents of bi-racial and Black children pass on to their children has shown that these messages help children deal with the negative effects of racism and discrimination, it helps children to deal with their minority status, it also prepares bi-racial children to handle multiracial micro aggressions and it fosters better educational outcomes (Rollins & Hunter, 2013; Wang & Huguley, 2012). Thus, explicit or overt racial socialization messages are a valued strategy that parents of Black and bi-racial children with Black heritage may use to positively support their children’s formation of their racial identity.

Racial identity

Psychologists Thomas, Speight and Witherspoon (2010) define racial identity as the “part of an individual’s self-concept or sense of self that is reflected through group membership status and perception of that membership” (p. 408). There are many models that researchers use to understand the significance of race in the identity of Blacks. Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley and Chavous (1998) developed a multidimensional framework through which we can understand the meaning African Americans attribute to being part of a racial group. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) proposes four dimensions of racial identity: the salience of identity (p.24), the centrality of identity (p.25), racial regard (p.26) and racial ideology (p.27).

“Salience” (p.24) refers to the relevance of race to the individual based on environmental cues. “Centrality” (p.25) refers to how the person defines him or herself with regard to race and it does not change over time, unlike salience which is not stable but changes based on the

situation. “Racial regard” (p.26) is the feeling one ascribes to being Black and it consists of both a private and public component. “Private regard” (p.26) is how the individual feels, positively or negatively about being African American and their membership in the group. “Public regard” (p.26) is the individual’s perception of how others perceive their racial group. Finally, “racial ideology” (p.27) is composed of four ideologies or philosophies describing how Blacks should behave and act in society. The first one is a “nationalist philosophy” (p.27) that highlights the uniqueness of being Black. Secondly, the “oppressed minority” (p.27) philosophy stresses the commonality between other oppressed groups and African American. Thirdly, the “assimilationist philosophy” (p.28) emphasizes the assimilation of Blacks in American society, whereas, the “humanist philosophy” (p.28) stresses the similarities between all human beings (Sellers et al., 1998).

All of the ideologies or philosophies listed above can help us to understand how Blacks identify themselves with respect to race using a multi-dimensional model rather than a uni-dimensional approach that does not fully capture Blacks’ experiences. Lalonde et al. (2008) conducted a study using the MMRI to measure Blacks’ racial identity in the Canadian context and found that, “most of the subscales proved to be both reliable and valid” (p.136).

Many researchers have noted that there is a relationship between parents’ racial socializing messages and identity developed in youth, and that racial identity is important in building resilience in Black youth when they encounter racial discrimination (Lalonde et al., 2008; Nebllette et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2010). Others have shown that the racial socialization messages that parents convey or transmit to their children shape and form youth racial identity (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Nebllette et al., 2009). Blacks in society are positioned as a marginalized group, who encounter racism and discrimination through societal and institutional barriers, so

evidently, the importance of Black and bi-racial youth and children developing a positive view of their race may set the life course of how they see themselves in relation to others in society.

Lesane-Brown (2006) stated, “Receiving race socialization messages in general and receiving specific messages about membership and group pride are hypothesized to result in positive racial identity and protection from internalizing negative racial stereotypes” (p.415). One such study is conducted by Demo and Hughes (1990) who examined the effect of racial socialization messages in the formation of racial identity in Black adults. They measured racial identity using three measures which included: (a) Feeling of closeness to other Blacks, (b) Black separatism i.e. how blacks are committed to and confined to their own social group, and (c) Black group evaluation i.e. “the belief that most black people possess negative characteristics” (p.367). The socialization messages that the adults received in their childhood were also assessed using four categories (see Demo & Hughes, 1990). Through correlation and regression analysis the study revealed that adults who received racial socialization messages in the childhood from their parents were more likely to feel a sense of closeness to other Blacks. Quantitative studies have found similar results that race socialization messages are positively associated with racial identity and that is buffers against racial messages that children receive about race (Sanders Thompson, 1994; Thompson, Anderson & Bakerman, 2000).

Differences in gender racial socialization messages: mixed findings

The findings on gender difference in racial socialization messages have yielded mixed results (Hughes et al., 2006). Some studies have shown that boys and girls received different racial messages about their racial groups, and that boys were more likely to receive messages about barriers whereas girls on the other hand, received messages about racial pride (Hughes et al., 2006; Neblette et al., 2009). Subsequently, Howard et al. (2013) in their study exploring

racial socialization practices of parents raising African American boys noted that only five out of thirteen African American parents believed that instilling racial pride in their sons was an important part of their socialization experiences.

Another study conducted by Sanders Thompson (1994) reported that in observing gender differences between males and females in the study, females reported that they received more race related messages from their immediate family than male children. She further explained that the gender differences in racial socialization messages may reflect family interaction between the sexes as well as Black families might observe events happening in society and socialize their children accordingly. Conversely, Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, Nickerson, (2002) examined parents' racial messages transmitted to children aged 4-5 years old and found no gender differences between girls and boys in the messages that they received. The researchers suggested that no gender differences could be attributed to the age of the children in the study, whereas, other studies have explored older children and found gender difference in racial socialization messages. The researcher further suggested that gender differences perhaps emerge in middle adolescence (Caughy et al., 2002). The mixed findings in gender differences in racial socialization messages could also be because of the measurement method that was used in each study, as well as for a variety of other reasons (location of the study, social class and education differences and so forth).

The influence of religiosity on racial socialization

In a study noted in the previous section exploring socialization practices of African American raising boys, spirituality and religion is one of the themes that emerged from the study (Howard et al., 2013). The researchers noted that spirituality and religion were mentioned by parents in the study as a way in which they teach their boys about feeling proud of their race and

that the African American churches that their children attended contributed to their children's development of racial pride. The church is an important institution for many African Americans, because it is a place where they obtain status and position that would be otherwise unavailable to them in the mainstream society (Hughes & Demo, 1990). African American religious institutions such as churches, were formed in a particular period marked by racial hostility and the church was a place where African American identity was and is persevered (Grayman-Simpson & Mattis, 2013). The churches are an important asset to Black communities as the members are taught skills that are beneficial to their everyday experiences and it also provides Black role models and leaders who may contribute to their community (Brega & Coleman, 1999). As such, African American religious institutions became a catalyst for group racial socialization, in providing for its members a sense of group identity and solidarity (Brega & Coleman, 1999). The sermons that are taught and the activities that are provided for its member foster a link to the past as well as providing social support (Brega & Coleman, 1999).

Given the strong influence that African American churches have in Black communities, researchers have found a positive relationship between racial identity and religiosity. One such study was conducted by Hughes and Demo (1990) who found a positive relationship between religious involvement and Black identity. Furthermore, Brega and Coleman (1999) expressed that Black churches may buffer against the negative effects of racism that youth encounters as they interact with the mainstream culture. Additionally, Howard et al's (2013) findings show the need for more studies to be done to fully understanding the importance of the role of churches on parents' racial socialization messages or practices.

Academic outcomes and racial socialization messages: mixed findings

Many studies have shown the positive benefits of racial socialization messages on academic outcomes amongst Black children, however, not much has been reported about biracial children having the same achievement outcomes. Some parents believe that racism is engrained in the educational system; for example mothers, in the study conducted by Suizzo et al. (2008) expressed the ways in which they observed racism in the educational system such as, differences in how Black and white children are disciplined, lower academic expectations for Black children, and the placement of Blacks in lower level classes. Despite these racial barriers, the parents in the study believed that having a good education was important for their children's future and to reduce the likelihood of poverty. As such, parents in the study taught their children about their history to prepare them for future discrimination. Other studies have yielded positive results in that parent's racial socialization messages do positively influence Black children's academic outcomes (Neblett et al., 2009; Wang & Huguley, 2012). Lesane-Brown (2006) noted that the few studies that examined the relationship between parents' racial socialization messages and academic outcomes, have found that children who received racial messages have higher grades than children who do not receive any messages about race. While she did not look at racial socialization and academic outcomes, Calliste (2003) noted that some Black parents in her Canadian study conveyed racial socialization messages to their children regarding education, such as "being twice as good as whites to compete" (p. 215). While other parents reported "supporting their children in doing their best, without the added pressure of out-doing white children" (p. 215).

Researchers have linked cultural socialization (which is the messages that teach children about their history and also self-worth messages) to specific academic outcomes such as, higher

high school graduation rates and higher GPA scores. There are also psychological benefits derived from racial socialization messages such as, being better prepared to persevere with difficult tasks and promoting social and emotional well-being (Neblett et al., 2009; Wang & Huguley, 2012). The studies that have examined the relationship between racial socialization messages and academic outcomes or achievements have shown that, the positive messages parents teach their children about race are beneficial to the success of Blacks in school, as well as to their development of a positive self-concept and racial identity. We know that parents of Blacks and bi-racial children are their primary source of racial socialization messages, but as children engage with different environments such as childcare/ preschool, schools, teachers, peers and the educational materials available to them, messages are also conveyed about race (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Fargo et al., 2015).

Racial messages in the early learning environment

Children learn about race from many different environments and how they interpret these messages about race is said to be based on their cognitive abilities (Farago et al., 2015; Sanders & Gaias, 2015). The early learning environments are sometimes the first environment where children learn intergroup behaviours and it may be the first environment where White and Black children learn about racism outside of the home environment (Farago et al., 2015). Kemple et al. (2016) suggested that children are aware of differences in the early childhood years and the early childhood years “are the genesis of the long racial socialization journey they embark upon for the remainder of their lives” (p. 99). Therefore, children are always constructing meaning about race as they interact in different social environments, so to ignore or take a colour blind approach to race or racism in an early learning environment does not prepare children for dealing with racial injustice (Brown et al., 2010, Husband, 2012; Kemple et al., 2016). Moreover, if teachers discuss

race and racism with young children it may intervene and help to dismantle children's problematic racial attitudes and beliefs, and support children in developing tolerance and respect for others (Farago et al., 2015)

Yet as stated, some teachers in the early childhood classroom adopt a color-blind approach as the desirable method for dealing with race (Boutte et al., 2011; Husband, 2012), similar to the silence approach taken by some parents. Boutte and colleagues (2011) suggest that teachers' unwillingness to discuss race with young children stems from their unfamiliarity or lack of knowledge about the availability of resources in supporting conversations about race. Farago et al. (2015) noted that teachers may take a colour-blind approach because they are not sure if talking about race is developmentally appropriate for young children, and that they may fear coming across as racist or even conveying the wrong information about race that might offend children and their family. They also note that some White teachers may not believe that racism is an issue in our society.

While there are many reasons why teachers employ a colour-blind approach, we live in a society where children will encounter people from different racial groups and a colour-blind approach "conceals important aspects of a person's identity, history, struggles, and legacies" (Boutte et al., 2011, p.9). Therefore, a colour-blind approach may cause teachers to unwittingly support or prop up a racially unjust system, by ignoring its existence (Farago et al. 2015) As such, it is important that teachers are cognizant of the messages that they communicate about race to children as the early learning environment is critical in supporting the development of Blacks and bi-racial children's racial identity; it may be the first environment outside of the home where they learn about themselves and others.

Gaps in the literature

This brief review of the literature highlights the benefits of parents' race socialization messages, such as positive academic outcomes, positive self-concept, positive self-esteem, self-worth, and how these message may act as a protective barrier against racism and discrimination. The literature review in this paper also demonstrates that, educators in the early learning environment have traditionally used a colour-blind approach in dealing with race and racism, believing that approach is synonymous with inclusivity. After surveying the literature, it is evident that parents' voices on how they would like to see their children's racial identity celebrated, honoured, reflected and reinforced in the early learning environments are non-existent. This study will seek to fill this gap by giving parents the opportunity to discuss their experiences regarding racial socialization and early learning environments and by providing recommendations on how to reinforce positive messages regarding Black identity in such environments.

Chapter 3. Methodology

I employed a qualitative method to understand parents of Black and bi-racial children's perspective on how their children's racial identity is represented in early learning environments, as well as to explore if parents in this study engaged in racial socialization. According to Creswell (2014) "qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Therefore, as stated previously, I am taking an interpretive approach and more specifically a constructivist approach to better understand the meaning parents ascribe to racial issues and to better understand their shared experiences in raising healthy black children in Canadian society. A related study that employed an interpretive approach was conducted by Doucet et al. (2016), who interviewed

Black mothers of preschoolers focusing on the experiences of the participants as they describe their parenting style and beliefs. . The preference for using a qualitative method is influenced by my personal experiences, research problem, and worldview (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing this study, I filled out an application and I submitted it to Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board, (REB) seeking their approval to conduct my study, which involves human participants. I also approached two childcare centres, seeking their permission to solicit parents who are currently enrolled at their location. After visiting the childcare centres and informing the supervisors about the study and showing them the flyers that would be handed out to the parents, they agreed to the solicitation of their clients who fit the description of the study. The letters that the centres were to give out were submitted to Ryerson University REB along with a completed ethics protocol and approval was granted by the REB to conduct the research.

Throughout the data collection process, steps were taken to respect confidentiality, as anonymity would not be possible because of the face-to-face nature of the interviews. As such, no identifiable information is included in the writing of this paper as pseudonyms were utilized as the data was transcribed, for both the names of the childcare centres and the names of the participants. The consent forms are stored separately from the transcription in a locked drawer. All the consent forms will be shredded after the completion and defense of this study.

All of the interviews were recorded and all audio recordings were transcribed into word documents on a password protected laptop computer. The typed document was only stored on a password protected USB thumb. Audio recordings were stored on a password protected USB thumb drive and kept in a locked drawer.

Sample and recruitment

The sample for this study consists of 20 parents whose children attend childcare centres in the Brampton area. Although 20 parents gave their consent, only five of the interviews were transcribed for this study due to time restraints connected to the nature of the MA program. However, I plan to transcribe the remaining interviews at a later date. On the advice of my supervisor I excluded the participants who were Caucasian parents raising Black children in order to focus my analysis on a more similar group of participants. After this process, I only transcribed the first 5 interviews, which this research paper is centered around.

All the participants identified themselves as female. The parents are from different socioeconomic backgrounds where their educational accomplishments ranged from college to university. The ages of the children whose parents were interviewed ranged from 3-4 years old and they were all enrolled in preschool classrooms. Two of the parents noted that their children will be starting kindergarten in the fall. Two of the parents mentioned that they are bi-racial, and that they identify as a “Black women” and 4 of the parents are first generation Canadian. One of the parents was born outside of Canada.

To gain access to participants I visited the childcare centres that had given me permission to be on their property to solicit parents for this study. I approached parents as they were walking out of the childcare centres at the end of the day with their children. I looked at the physical appearance of the parents as well as their children and determined if I should solicit their participation or not. There were times when I approached someone leaving with a child and found out that they were not the biological parent, but rather an aunt, uncle or family friend. In those cases, I smiled warmly and handed them the flyer and consent form to pass on to the parents of the children. In addition to handing out the flyers and consent forms, I explained to

potential participants the purpose of the study and how long the interview might take and I also explained briefly how the data would be used. I ended my introduction by encouraging the participants to read the consent form for further information after they took the flyer. I handout flyers from 3:00 pm to the close of business at 6:30 PM because I felt that parents would have more time to listen as I explained the purpose of the study, as opposed to handing out flyers in the morning when the parents are dropping their children to their classroom and trying to get to work on time.

It is noteworthy to mention that as a Black researcher I chose to hand out flyers directly to parents, as there is a history of distrust that Black communities exhibit towards researchers. According to Printz (2015) the history of mistrust for researchers can be dated back to the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment conducted between 1932 and 1972 where treatment was intentionally withheld from African American men with the disease. Thus, I wanted to be seen as an insider as much as possible in order to gain participants' trust, so that I might understand and record their words and experiences as accurately as possible (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). The participants were given a copy of the flyer (see Appendix A) and a copy of the consent form (See Appendix B). Some of the participants signed the consent forms on the spot after reading about the study and interviews were set up at times that were convenient for the participants. The participants who did not sign the consent forms on the spot, contacted the researcher by phone to set up an interview time as well as to ask any questions or voice concerns that they had.

The reason why I chose to approach these two childcare centres to participate in the study was because I was familiar with the centres as I had mentored students in the early childhood program from a local community college who were completing their field practicum placements

in both of the centres. I had no relationships with parents or their children or staff at the childcare centres. At the time of the study, I had no students completing field practicum at either of the centres that the parents attend. These two sites were chosen as well because they had a good representation of Black children in attendance.

Setting

The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings. Some of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, while some were conducted at the participants' workplace after work in a quiet space. Other settings included the public library and at the childcare centre in a classroom that was closed for the day. The interviews were done at different times during the day to accommodate the participants' schedules. The locations were chosen by the participants and the interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Data Collection

The participants engaged in a face-to-face semi-structured interview that allowed for some open-ended elements. The semi-structured interview was used as a tool to facilitate conversation between the researcher and the participants. The open ended questions aimed to foster conversation and to encourage the participants to naturally and freely express their own experiences and opinions. Semi-structured interviews are of great benefit as they allow for reciprocity between the participants and the researcher. As noted by Galletta, and Cross, (2013), this type of interview “creates space for the researcher to probe a participant’s response for clarification, meaning making and critical reflection” (p. 24). There were times when the participants expressed their experiences and I probed for clarification to further understand the meaning that the participants ascribed to the situation. If slang or jargon was used that I was

unfamiliar with or words were chosen that could convey another meaning, I would ask the participants for clarification in order to accurately capture the true meaning of their words.

During the interview process I was very conscious of how I presented myself to the participants. When I would meet with a participant, I made sure that I did not dress myself to be perceived as making an “I am just like you” statement. I did not want to assume that my insider status would make participants naturally want to share their experiences with me. Likewise, Few et al. (2003) cautions the researcher to be cognizant that, “clothing, hairstyles, makeup, and personal adornment make political statements that are deeply rooted in the African American experiences, as these are cultural expressions, artifacts, and cues that influence the tempo of the participant researcher relationship” (p. 207). As such, recognizing that within the Black community there are possible barriers such as differences in class, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnicity, I attempted to navigate through these possible barriers using verbal and nonverbal communication.

Even though I had some preliminary interview questions drafted to explore the research questions, many times the participants took the lead in the interview as they would tell stories to further illustrate or emphasize their point of view. Thus, it ended up being an open-ended interview instead of a strictly semi-structured interview as my original plan was to gather information using a semi-structured interview style. It was very important that I recognized that I was in a position of power as the researcher and to balance that by allowing the participants to sometimes take control of the interviews because it was their experiences that I was interested in exploring and capturing.

Before the start of the interview, participants signed a consent form where they would agree to participate and be voice recorded or not. All recordings were copied to a password

secured USB thumb drive. The files were later transcribed into a word document and all files are password protected and will be destroyed after the completion of this study. I chose to digitally record audio transcripts of the participants' interviews because I wanted to focus on what they were sharing and I recorded a few details on a note pad to help me remember the participants' nonverbal communication such a smile or rolling of the eyes and other expressions that the audio recording would not have captured. Roberts-Holmes (2014) noted that, it is impossible to write everything down that the participants are sharing and that digitally recording the interviews allows you the space and time to focus on the discussion with the participants.

Approach to Data Analysis

As stated previously, I seek to explore two questions, which are: (1) Do parents in this study engage in racial socialization practices, and if so, what is it that they do and why? (2) What are parents of Black and bi-racial children's perceptions about how their children's racial identity is being represented in the early learning environment? I approached the data using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as, "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data" (p.6). The reason for choosing thematic analysis over other analytic methods lies in the flexibility that this method provides and that is not tied to one theoretical lens or epistemological approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis is a constructionist method in that it explores the ways in which individual perceptions of events, realities and experiences are a product of different societal discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Undoubtedly, thematic analysis is the best choice, since I am interested in gaining knowledge from the participants in how they interpret and make meaning of race and racism.

Prior to transcribing the audio recordings, I noticed that during the interviews, there were similar themes and ideas as the participants were describing their experiences. The six steps to qualitative analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) were constantly present in my mind as I approached transcribing and doing thematic analysis. Briefly these included: I listened to the audio recording multiple times, making sure that I did not miss a word during the transcribing process. After I was certain that I had captured the participants' verbatim accounts onto paper, I began the process of reading and re-reading the data looking for patterns. Patterns were highlighted using different coloured markers and post it notes, and I wrote down what I believed to be the categories or patterns. I then used a computer to highlight section of the data from individual transcript and copy and paste it under the selective codes. After collating all the codes together I printed it and analyzed it through the lens of my research questions and theoretical framework. After analyzing all the extracts under each code, and collating all the information and re-reading all the participant's transcripts multiple times, there were four major themes that I assert captured the participants' experiences. The first two themes relate to the first research question and the next two themes are related to the second research question. The themes that I identified are as follows:

1. Parents' racial socialization behaviours connected to Black identity
2. Parents using socialization to combat racism
3. Lack of resources that support their children's race, culture and identity
4. Diversity of teachers or "authority belongs to everybody"

To ensure that the themes are accurately reflecting the parents' perception of their children's experiences, I met with the participants and discussed the codes and themes that came from reviewing the transcripts in order to make certain that the findings truly represented their views.

Chapter 4. Finding

The findings of this study are reflective of five participants' experiences during their thirty minute to one hour interview sessions. As previously stated four themes were identified during the analysis process of the interviews. The themes are as follows: (a) Parents' racial socialization behaviours connected to black identity, which includes the sub-themes of buying Afrocentric books, conversation about skin colour, hair differences and buying Afrocentric artifacts (b) Parents using racial socialization to combat racism (c) Lack of resources that support their children's race, culture and identity (d) Diversity of teachers or "authority belongs to everybody". In the following, I explore each of the themes and discuss the sub-themes identified.

1) Parents' racial socialization behaviours connected to Black identity

Buying Afrocentric Books

The parents in this study use different methods to socialize their children about race. Three of the five participants stated that they read stories involving black characters to their children as a way of teaching their children about being Black. When I asked the participants "what is your reason for reading books centered about Black issues?" A mother of a four year old boy stated,

Because I think it's important for kids to have information available to them where they identify with the characters, whether it's through the illustrations or even if it's the character itself. Being a Black child or a Black person, it helps that child have a broader understanding of what it means to be a person of colour.

Another parent mentioned that she does not actively seek out Afrocentric books because her four year old son already knows that he's "Black." She said,

I think at this age my son knows that he is Black. He identifies with who he is and he knows that other children are different.

However, this parent also mentioned that she would purchase Afrocentric books if they were readily available at her local superstore.

Conversations about skin colour and hair differences

Some of the parents used books as a way to start the conversation about skin and hair differences with their children. One of the mother expressed,

I felt pretty good about talking about hair, starting the dialog in that way. In terms of skin colour, her godmother actually got her a book called, "*Pretty Little Black Girl*." We've talked about it in that sense.

All of the five mothers engaged in direct conversation about skin and hair difference with their children. When the mothers were asked, "Do you discuss skin colour and hair differences with your child? If you do, how do you go about it? One of the mothers responded,

We do, we talk about people being different, not everybody looks the same. People have different eyes, different hair, and different skin colour. I'll asked him, what colour is your skin? And he said, "Brown." And he understands that his skin is brown and other people have white skin.

Another parent mentioned that skin differences is something that comes up in her home very often and her response to the question is,

I don't tread lightly, kids are very brutal, I have the lightest skin complexion in the house and my son who is the closest to my complexion, often tells people that he has a white mother, so it comes up all the time where I have to have these conversation with my child. Sometimes it starts off as jest, but then it ends up being a social lesson and of what is actually the diversity of our family. So, we talk about skin tones.

One of the parent mentioned that she tests her three year old child's comprehension about skin differences by asking questions.

So I kind of asked the question, "which one of these dolls look like me and you?" And she held it up and said "look mommy this one looks like me and you". But she picked up the other doll which was lighter skinned...Ken doll and said "this one looks like daddy and brother." And so then right there she was able to see a difference, even though we're all Black, she is able to see that her skin tone is different from her dad and brother, we all look different, so that's a conversation I plan to explore a little bit more as the year goes on.

The mothers in this study employed different ways to combat the different messages that children received about their hair texture. One parent recalled that her four year old niece came home asking her mom to make her hair straight because princesses have straight hair. She stated,

She feels that so and so is beautiful because she's got the long straight hair or so and so is beautiful because she wears these party dresses and her hair is like straight, so my niece wants us to just brush her hair which is not possible. Every girl wants to be Barbie and Barbie doesn't necessarily have Afrocentric hair, and now they are coming out with dark skinned Barbie, a Black Barbie! But the Black Barbie does not have Afrocentric hair, it's not curly and short. Barbie is wearing a long weave or long hair. Which is not necessarily representative of Black people. You know, because most Black people don't come with long black straight hair."

While all the mothers who have girls discussed hair differences with their children, one of the mothers who has a four year old boy stated,

Well, for my son, he has hair, and we keep it very low. He has asked in the past if he could have his hair grow straight and I said, if your hair grows it's not going to be straight, you don't have that kind of hair. So I explained that look at daddy, he has short hair, if daddy grows his hair it gets curly. It's never going to be straight.

Buying Afrocentric Artifacts

Three of the parents mentioned that they actively seek out Afrocentric artifacts such as a dolls, while other parents have instruments, paintings and other ornaments. One parent described her experiences buying an Afrocentric doll for her three year old daughter.

I had my daughter with me and she was holding her black doll and the moment she saw all the other white dolls she said "mommy I don't want this doll anymore I want those ones." So that was a moment for me to really talk about it with her. So she started kicking and screaming that she wanted the other doll. For me the reason why she wanted it was something that I noticed for myself. So when I looked at the black doll, it came with a house dress, like it wasn't anything fancy, compared to all the other white dolls, their clothes are all fancy. The princesses are nice and pink and frilly and then the one little black girl had like a little flowery blue dress on. So I found that it wasn't necessarily appealing the way they made it even though I looked at her and thought it's a beautiful doll umm...my daughter somehow found that something was wrong with it because it didn't look like the other dolls.

When the question was asked, how is Black identity represented in your home? One parent stated,

I brought two drums when I went to Africa, so I have that in terms of music form. I also have decorative carvings....so I make sure that I have some of those things readily available for my kids, because the drums are very big in African culture in terms of being in touch with your roots.

All the parents expressed that Black identity is represented in their home through food and music, used as a means to teach their children about their culture. Another mother noted that she purchased African print clothing and she makes sure that the television shows that her daughter watches gives an accurate depiction of Blacks. She expressed,

I feel like with my younger daughter, in terms of me getting the black dolls, in terms of me getting African print and African clothing in the house and buying those sorts of things for her I feel like she is going to be more in touch with her African roots or African history. Umm the TV shows we watch, I kind a make sure it's in tune with who we are.

2) Parents using racial socialization to combat racism

The mothers in the study all engaged in racial socialization behaviours with their children. They racially socialize their children because of their perceived bias, inequality and racism in society. Prior to presenting the racial socialization strategies used to combat bias, inequality, and racism, participants' perceptions of bias, inequality and racism in this country are presented. Most specifically, when asked the question, "What does being black in Canada mean to you?" One of the mothers responded,

Well considering what this world is going through right now, hmm, it's different than our neighbors in the United States, but I think it's tough to be Black in Canada depending on where you live and what you do because there is racism everywhere. I find here in Canada, it's not as blatant and overt as other places, so you almost have to be on your guard ready to react to something that comes across very subtle.

One of the mothers also mentioned that society has a preconception of Black people, she noted that the common belief is that,

We do half as good a job, and if you hire someone else who is not Black, you get a better job done. These are lies that are told to people, they were told to us, they were told to our parents especially here to maintain the status quo.

Another mother described being Black in Canada as a “struggle,” she mentioned,

For me it means struggles. I don’t know about anybody else, I can’t speak for anybody else, but for me it’s a struggle.

Another mother replied,

Shadism I guess you would say, so I believe that there are opportunities for black people in Canada but I feel like a light skinned black woman is going to have it easier than dark skinned black man in this country. I feel like if you have to choose between a dark skinned man and a light skinned man, they are going to go for the light skinned man. And there is this idea around that the closer you are to kind of those Eurocentric features and ideals, the better it is for you. However, if you are a black man who happens to be dark skinned or doesn’t necessarily fit that European standard of beauty, I feel like there is idea that you gotta work twice as hard or be twice as good so there are opportunities for Black people in this country definitely, but I think there are still challenges within the system and how it is setup.

Empowerment through racial socialization

The mothers in the study also engaged in racial socialization behaviours to empower their children to combat what they perceive to be inequality and racism in society. One of the mothers stated,

I want him (her child) to feel confident and empowered, and good about himself and good in his skin that he doesn’t feel that he cannot compete with other races out there. I want him to be a good strong Black kid in society.

Another mother described why she empowers her son, she stated,

We’ve taken the stance that it’s both our job to empower our kids to make sure that they at least have the knowledge to make relevant choices as, it pertains to how they conduct themselves and how they have to prepare for their future plans. We are not trying to give them a crutch, but we want to make sure that they are aware of the realities of society.

Another mother noted that she educates her children about the reality of society in which her children live, she explained,

“I feel if you don’t you are hindering them instead of setting them up for success”.

In empowering their children, the mother also tell their children that they have to work harder in society. Three of the mothers during their interview mentioned that they remind their preschool boys that they are Black males and it will be tougher for them. One of them stated,

At the same time always remind him he’s a Black male, which is tough, Black males do have it harder.

Another mother gave an example of how she supports, encourages, empowers and builds her son’s self-esteem. She explains:

I don’t want him to feel less than anybody else and he’s reminded constantly that he’s handsome, he’s strong and he can do whatever he wants, he just has to be willing to do it and be confident that he can do it. If he sits there and cries about not being able to open something, I say “stop” take a minute and try again don’t cry we can do this. Then I am like, see you did it, you know, I want him to feel strong that he can do things, anything out there you can do it, you are able to do it. I give him those opportunities, if it’s schooling, if it’s piano, if it is sports, I want him to feel like he can do anything. I don’t ever want him to feel that he is less than anyone, he must always know that he can compete with anybody out there.

For some of the mothers, racially socializing their children is a way of helping them to be successful in their education and society. One of the mother noted that,

Breaking the status quo for me is education and education doesn’t always happen in a formal environment. No teachers are going to tell my kids these things, it’s my job.

Another mother reinforces education through hard work. She stated:

You really have to let your skills prove, show proof of what you’re capable of. You have to do better than everybody else. You can’t control people’s opinions. People are going to be prejudice, people are going to discriminate and it’s up to you to change their minds. So you have to show why they should choose you over somebody else because it’s always going to come down to what it is that you present, what are you going to come to the table with? So if you don’t work hard then what are you going to come to the table with? If you work hard, you’ll have limitless opportunities. Cause of course there are barriers. Race creates barriers.

3) Lack of resources that support their children's race, culture and identity

Yet another theme that was identified in connection to the second research question was the lack of resources that support parents' race, culture and identity in the childcare centres.

When the mothers in the study were asked "Is your child's identity represented in the childcare centre your child attends?" Four of the mothers said, "No" and one said "not really." One mother of a four year old stated:

Well I say not really. But when you really look at it I guess there are some books, some posters and stuff but there isn't anything that stands out or that my children can say oh mommy this is what we did in class or this is what we have in our class that they can identify with umm... racially, culturally, not really.

Another mother of a three year old responded to the question by saying:

Right now, I don't think so. Just in my daughter's own class it's pretty much a mix of ethnicities. But if I were to say. If I saw anything specific in the classroom, I would have to say no. They try to have books that are more multicultural, nowadays, I feel like the books just have that one Black kid, that one Asian kid in the lines of the story, but you would never see a story that's centered around the main character being a Black person. I don't feel that and I don't see that.

When the mothers were asked if it was important for their children's identity to be represented in the early learning environment all the five participants stated, "Yes!" One of the participant responded by saying, "100% it's important to me. I think it would be nice".

A mother of a four year old boy also stated that:

You know, so to me it's important that from the time they come into any learning environment they start to learn those difference too because it makes you question yourself, it makes you conduct your own behavior. You know, if you're taught to believe, believe me people are taught to believe in their own culture that they are racially superior to other people. It's in every culture, in every culture.

In response to how they would like to see Black identity represented in childcare centres? One of the mothers mentioned that:

Well I think more materials could be utilized. Things like black history month they should take that on a little bit more and get the ball rolling. Maybe, they can't supply materials all year round, but have a bin or box, specifically for black history, whereas, you have materials that can rotate for that whole month each group of children will get one box one week in the month and program something towards that. I think that would be beneficial.

Another parent expressed:

Just more options. I know there aren't a lot of options out there just more babies that are of different ethnicities. The emotion dolls have different emotions and they also represent different ethnicities too but why does the black one have to be sad, you know or angry? Have every doll represented the same in a childcare setting. The Black doll is always so sad or so angry that's what the child is going to see every single day. But then the white doll has rosy cheeks and is very happy. You know like, why can't they be sad too? All the white dolls should have all emotions and the Asian dolls should have every single emotion and the black dolls should have every single emotion. Umm... books, lots of books not just books of the colour of my skin or the texture of my hair.

Another mother stated in response to the question,

I feel like childcare is supposed to prepare them for what all the possibilities are for them and if there is only one narrative being told within the daycare centre my daughter may not necessarily know that there are any other stories that she can subscribe to. There may not be any other stories to help her realize that hey, I can be a doctor, I can be an astronaut. When I think of those roles, I don't think of black faces in those roles. I feel like it should be represented from the cooking menu to the books to even some of the instruments that are in the class rooms, even the traditional songs that are sung, there are a lot of nursery rhymes and songs that are sung within African communities and Caribbean communities. So perhaps we can have some kind of sharing so that there is that sense of continuity so that what happens at home is being seen in the daycare, I would like to be able to see that.

Another mother also noted that,

It's really just reaching out to the parents. I would like to see my daycare reach out to me and ask; what are some of the customs you do at your house? So that it's not just a general idea of these are what black people are like, but it's really reflective of the children and it's going to be changing all the time and I think that's going to be reflective of the relationship that teachers are building with parents.

4) Diversity of teachers, Authority belongs to everyone

The second theme in connected to the second research question is the diversity of teachers in the early childhood environment. One of the parents noted the importance of having diversity among the staff, she stated that,

Staff representation is important, I know you cannot necessarily pick staff that is representative of every single person in you centre but I think there should be diversity among the staff that are there. And then just even thinking about the type of roles that you have people in, you don't want to necessarily have staff where the only black people working there, are maybe cleaners, or just the cook, you know, some of these roles sometimes traditionally have just been occupied or filled by minorities.

Another mother noted the impact of not having a Black teacher,

It all depends on the teachers. If my son had a Black teacher he would have come home with a lot more things and talked more about his history and culture and things like that. If he doesn't have a Black teacher, then I don't think he is going to get that.

Other mothers talked about the importance of their child having teachers that look like their children. One mother stated:

I think so because especially for him, because he's getting ready to go to school which is a whole different ball game. I think him understanding authority as it's, umm, as authority belongs to everybody, authority doesn't have to be just a white teacher you know, or just because we're in ... (small town in outside of Toronto) it doesn't have to be just a brown policeman. Authority can be found in your own race, so, I think it's very important for him to have peers and teachers that look like him. You know, not necessarily that he can't do well with a white teacher of course he can! You know, but I think sometimes people are taught to say, well I don't see colour. You better see colour when you see my child.

Another mother also noted that the need for Black male in early learning environments she stated,

I would love to see young black men choose this career path, I would love to see young black men attracted into early childhood field. Because we already know our boys respond better to male caregivers.

One of the parents believes that having diversity in staff will help fill that gap where the teachers lack cultural training in childcare centres. She explains:

So by training I am an ECE. I'm not working in that field right now but umm...I don't recall there being a course. I don't think right now there's a diversity course or any training that delves right into cultural awareness. You're in the program for 2 years and then that's it. You're registered and then you're an ECE. And I think that it just needs to come across perhaps in professional development. I know sometimes when we think about childcare centres, it's more so how can we set up our classrooms, more so about how can we be more inclusive. And when we think of inclusion, people automatically think of special needs. But you're not thinking about all the other things that fall under inclusion."

Chapter 5. Discussion

This study expands the knowledge of racial socialization practices among Black Canadian parents utilizing an early learning environment and this study is one of the first of its kind to explore parents' perceptions of how their children's racial identity is represented in the early learning environment. The early learning environment is crucial to the development of Black and Bi-racial children's racial identity development as it may be the first environment outside of the home where children learn about themselves and others. At the core of this study were two research questions; the first being, to explore if Black parents in Canada engaged in racial socialization behaviours and if they do, what is the motive for engaging in these practices and secondly to explore parents' perceptions of how their children's identity is being represented in the early learning environment. After conducting face-to-face open ended interviews with parents and employing a thematic analysis to investigate and explore their perceptions, four major themes were drawn from the analysis.

Racial socialization behaviours connected to Black identity

Firstly, parents in this study engaged in racial socialization behaviours, such as, buying Afrocentric artifacts, and having conversations about skin colour and hair differences, and using books and television in order to teach their children about themselves and about their race. A

study conducted by Coard, Wallace, Stevenson and Brotman (2004) exploring culture based parent socialization practices (i.e. racial socialization) with 15 African American mothers, corroborates these findings. The researchers found that the mothers in their study also used television and books to initiate conversation about race and also as a tool to teach children about race, which they labeled as “exposure” (Coard et al., 2004). Other researchers have noted that using books is a great means of teaching young children about race and racism as it helps to foster and open up conversation about race (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Kemple et al., 2016; Kemple and Lopez, 2009).

Parents using racial socialization to combat racism

Mothers in this study engaged in racial socialization behaviours because they want to strengthen and build their children’s resilience to perceived bias and inequality in society. In other words, it appears that the mothers in this study perceive that their children will encounter racism living in Canada and, thus, they attempt to counteract this inevitability by teaching them about race in order to better prepare them for a racist society. In addition to being a protective necessity, these mothers also clearly recognized that their children would be at a disadvantage if they failed to teach their children about their identity, because they believed that neither the early learning environment their children attend nor formal schooling, given their (mostly white) teachers, will tell them the truth about being Black in Canadian society. In short, the mothers seem to have an understanding of how racism in society shapes their children’s experiences and as a consequence, they employ strategies for teaching and supporting their children’s development in a society where, according to CRT, racism is everywhere and that society is set up in ways that favors white over colour because it serves a purpose for the dominant group psyche and for material benefits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

For example, as noted in the findings section, the mothers discussed shadism or colourism with children as a way to reinforce that their darker shade complexion is beautiful and that society is programmed to think that a lighter shade is better. Despite such discussions, we still heard two of the mothers in the study report that their children will tell others that they have a white mommy or daddy despite their efforts to correct them. It would appear that these children have come to the conclusion that society prefers white skin over darker skin, which may be influenced by the different environments and/or materials to which they are exposed. Indeed in a study investigating colorism with white interviewers' perceptions of minority respondent's skin tone and intelligence revealed that, lighter skin toned people were perceived by whites as being more intelligent than darker skinned toned people (Hannon, 2015). These barriers in society further support the importance of racial socialization practices of Black parents.

Lack of resources supporting racial identity

The history of Blacks in Canada is similar in some regard to that of the Blacks in the USA in that they are faced with similar struggles, but on the other hand, their experiences are different, based on differences in historical, geographical and political events. No wars were fought in Canada over slavery such as the Civil War that was fought in the United States and as such, many Canadians might not think that racism is a 'big' issue. Yet, nearly all the mothers in this research perceived that their children's culture and racial identity as not being represented in the early learning environment and they believe that their children should see people and objects in the environment that support their identity. This lack of representation could stem from the colour blind approach that many educators subscribe to, in treating all children the same, however, a colour blind approach only addresses the most blatant forms of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Consequently, children need to see their culture and identity

represented in their environment, as the environment can impact how their self- concept and sense of placement and position as members of their community. As Wardle (1995) notes, “a child who feels she belongs to a family, community, and culture will develop a healthy self- image. This is why it is so critical that schools and early childhood programs support a child’s home environment, culture, race, language, lifestyle, and values” (p. 44). Therefore, the early childhood environment must consider the unique experiences of Blacks in Canada in order to foster an environment where parents feel that their children’s identity is fully included, where there is not just one narrative or culture being celebrated and accepted.

Diversity and teachers “Authority belongs to everybody”

Teachers in the early learning environment are faced with the task of providing authentic experiences that support children from all different cultures. However, mothers in the study highlighted the importance of Black boys having Black male role models in the early learning environment. While the percentage of males in early learning environment such as childcare centres is very low in comparison to females, the number of Black males in childcare centres is even lower. The need to have more Black male teachers in early learning environments such as childcare centres is crucial to the development of young Black boys. There is a higher percentage of single mother households among Black families entering childcare, therefore Black male role models can be a benefit to a Black child’s development, as well as providing exposure for children who are of a different race to encounter and interact first hand with Black males, challenging negative stereotype that children hear and see in society about Black males. A study conducted by Gershenson, Hall, Parageorge (2016) highlighted the need for Black children to have diverse representation in their teachers. The study suggests that White teachers are more likely than Black teachers to have low expectation of Black students’ academic success

(Gershenson et al., 2016). If teachers have this negative belief about students, especially Black boys, this can affect how they perform academically and how they perceive themselves in relation to other groups in society.

In addition to recruiting and hiring Black ECEs, and Black male ECEs in particular, it is important that all teachers recognize that diversity in programming is a continuous process, and that it is also important that teachers think reflectively about the materials that they introduce to young children as children can receive unintended messages about race. One of the mothers in the study drew attention to the notion that teachers in the early learning environment need more culturally appropriate training, specifically in understanding the unique experiences of Blacks in Canada. For example, a teacher may tell their students about famous Black icons in American history and neglect the teaching of Black icons in Canadian History. Gay and Kirkland (2003) suggested that cultural awareness involves teachers increasing their cultural critical consciousness in order to develop their “skills in self-reflection and critical consciousness specific to racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity” (p. 183). While researchers may suggest a number of ways to develop teachers’ or educators’ cultural competency, the main idea is for teachers to become reflective practitioners (see MacNevin & Berman, 2016).

Chapter 6. Strengths and Limitations

Trustworthiness

Interpretive qualitative research seeks to gather in-depth information during the research process in order to seek to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to their experiences, which differs from quantitative research which seeks to measure objective truth by collecting data that is measurable (Creswell, 2014; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Because of the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, the criteria for producing a trustworthy

study also differs (Guba, 1981). For this reason, Guba (1981) has suggested four criteria for assessing the validity and reliability of a qualitative study, such as, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this section I will address validity and reliability concerns through these four criteria.

Credibility

A variety of strategies were employed to establish credibility. Firstly, transcripts from the interviews and coding were shared during a private meeting with my study supervisor who has extensive experience in conducting and analyzing qualitative studies. Shenton (2004) noted that, it is important that researchers allow peers, colleagues or academics to scrutinize their project, because it is a valuable way for the researchers to get feedback that may challenge their assumptions, biases and it may also help the researchers to refine their methods, design or strengthen their study.

Another strategy is member checks or member reflections, which Tracy (2010) described as, “allowing for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study’s findings, and providing opportunity for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation and even collaboration” (p. 844). Any participant who requested it via their consent form was given a copy of their interview transcript to read over and make any changes. Some of the participants made changes to the transcripts. The findings of the study were given back to all of the participants to verify that the findings represent an accurate representation of their experiences. Furthermore, Tracy (2010) suggested that such member checks’ or member’s reflections strengthen qualitative credibility as it is an avenue to get “deeper and richer analysis” (p. 844). Lastly, triangulation, a further strategy that may be used to enhance credibility was achieved through checking the findings with attention to (1) the current research literature (2) the theoretical framework noted earlier in this

MRP, and (3) by using member checks, as previously noted, as a way to understand the participants' experiences.

Transferability

The aim of this small qualitative study was to capture and record the participants lived experiences within a specific context. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study is not representative of all Black Canadians' lived experiences. Creswell (2014) cautions that the intent of qualitative inquiry is not to generalize the findings to other individuals, sites and places outside of the context of the study. However, the findings of this study may be a starting point to foster conversation or dialogue about the representation of race and Black identity in the early childhood settings and to improve practice. Tracy (2010) notes that, "transferability is achieved when the readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action" (p. 845). To further transferability, the samples were drawn from two childcare sites, and participants who are members of or are affiliated with the Black community were randomly approached by the researcher.

In addition, in qualitative research, thick description is achieved by giving the reader sufficient detail about the phenomena that is being studied (Tracy, 2010). I have provided the reader with in-depth information about the settings, length of the interviews, number of participants, the interview questions in an appendix and quotations from the participants to ensure that the "readers have a proper understanding of the study, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations" (Shenton, 2004, p.70).

Dependability

Shenton (2004) argues that in order to address dependability issues within a qualitative study, the process should be conveyed in rich detail as to enable future researchers to replicate the work. Similarly, Guba (1981) notes that having an “audit trail” whereby the researcher documents the process, how data was collected, analyzed and interpreted can be used to assess the dependability and trustworthiness of the study. As discussed previously in this paper, the tool used to gather information was an open ended structured interview and the participants were audio recorded and then later, the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions were read multiple times and again as noted, member checks were done. The data were coded and re-coded numerous times, and some of the data extracts were placed under more than one code during the process. There were times that I took a break from the data and revisited it at another time because I wanted to see if that process, stepping back from the data, generated fresh insight. Stepping back from the data allowed me to see patterns that I did not previously identify in the data set. Additionally, documentation such as, interview notes that recorded participants’ non-verbal behaviours that the recorder cannot capture, transcriptions of the interviews, post it notes, and journal notes were utilized.

Confirmability

Creswell (2014) suggests that, researchers engage in reflectivity, whereby they self-reflect about any bias that they bring to the study. He noted that, “good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history and socioeconomic origin” (p. 202). On the other hand, Shenton (2004) noted, that it is difficult to obtain real objectivity since, “tests and questionnaires are designed by humans, the intrusion of the researchers’ biases is inevitable” (p.

72). As reflectivity is a key component of qualitative research, in this project reflectivity was achieved through field notes, journal, audio recording, and having an honest dialogue with participants about the nature, risks and benefits, if any to the participants. I have also been honest throughout this report in that I communicate to the reader that I am a Black women with young children and have consider how my social location will have an impact in how the data is interpreted and analyzed. While it is difficult to ever ensure objectivity, because our biases and experiences influence the meaning that we ascribe to phenomena, I included exact excerpts from the participants' interviews so that the readers hear the participants' perspective and their voices, although ultimately the way the data is framed is via my voice. Thus, bias, or better yet social location, can also serve as a source of insight, and being an insider as a Black parent allowed me to design interview questions and analyze my data in a way that coming from outside that social location may not have allowed. Being a part of the Black community the mothers' experiences echoed similar themes that I have heard within my social networks and resonated with my experiences as a Black mother raising Black children in Canada. When the parents were describing their experiences they expressed a sense of comradery as Black mothers while referencing themselves and this researcher as "us" and "we".

Limitations

Nevertheless, being a Black woman, who shares a similar cultural background with most of the participants, I am aware that my cultural background may influence how I interpret race and discrimination. By the same token, even though I was an insider to the community I was studying, I took steps to reduce any biases by having the participants view their interview transcriptions and verify the findings.

Secondly, there is a lack of information in the literature regarding Black parents' perception of how their children's race and identity is represented in the early learning environment from a Canadian context. The majority of the studies discussed in the literature review that explored Black parents racial socialization behaviours, or practices or include parents' perspectives are from an African American context. As such, there are not a lot of studies that corroborates these findings within the Canadian context.

Lastly, due to the time constraints of completing this project, I could not interview all of the people who signed the consent form, or even transcribe all of the interviews that were actually conducted for this study. If I had done so, perhaps this would have shaped the analysis and interpretation of the phenomena being studied. It is worth noting that if I had to do this study again, I would study mothers raising bi-racial children separately as these mothers' experiences are unique and are worthy of being explored as they encounter different forms of barriers, such as colorism.

Chapter 7. Implications for ECE practice

The early learning environment is crucial to the development of Black and bi-racial children. The mothers in the study expressed that their children's race and identity was not being represented in the early learning environment. Therefore, educators need to be proactive in building collaborative partnerships through authentic dialog with parents where they can share some of their values, beliefs and customs. Research has shown that parents of Black and Biracial children engage in racial socialization behaviours to mitigate the negative impact of racism and discrimination (Lalonde et al., 2008; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Suizzo et al., 2008). It is important that educators understand parents' racial socialization behaviours, in supporting Black children's racial identity and integrate some of these practices in their curriculum planning.

The parents in the study also identified a lack of resources that represented their children's race in the early learning environment, and they also pointed out that the books that are found in the centre usually deals with stereotypical issues such as skin colour and hair textures. Farago et al. (2015), argued that, "teachers have the opportunity to increase the complexity of children's schemas regarding race through planned and spontaneous classroom activities and interactions" (p.49). The teachers can make sure that they accurately screen the books that they include in the book area of the classroom and ensure that there are books available that position Black children's race in a positive light. The books should depict Black people engaging in normal activities such as going to the grocery store, having dinner, enjoying themselves, and not just depicting hardships or struggles. While, struggles and hardships are faced by Blacks, children that are Black and non-black need to know that Black people engage in normal routine activities such as going to the dentist or to the park or even swimming.

Parents also expressed that they felt as if many of the teachers were lacking in cultural awareness of Blacks and how they try to navigate through the challenges of the society they live in. As such, training needs to start from the College and University level in order to equip early childhood educators with knowledge and training that is socially responsive to issues encountered by Blacks as they seek to support their children. This kind of social justice training should not be left to individual organizations or centres to implement, but should be a mandatory prerequisite of any early childhood education program, as Canada is such a diverse and multicultural country. In order to give black children a healthy start, the environment must be culturally responsive and inclusive of their racial identity. Fargo et al., (2015) noted that one of the causes of the marginalization of Black children may be related to the "lack of adequate teacher preparation to teach in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms." (p.31)

Chapter 8. Future Study

In this study, the voices of five mothers' lived experiences were explored, however, future studies should seek to include the voices of Black fathers' perception of how their children's identity is being represented in the early learning environment and investigate their role in the racial socialization of their children. One of the mothers in the study expressed that there are not enough Black male role models for her son to look up to in the early learning environment. She felt that it is very important that Black boys have positive male role models as there is a high percentage of Black children being raised in single parent households, and the early learning environment may be the only source of positive male role models. Future studies should also explore the lack of Black males in the early learning environment. Two mothers in the study mentioned that their children refer to them as white, because of their lighter complexion, therefore, studies also need to be conducted in order to explore children's perception of race and privileges based on skin tone.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

This study sheds light on an area that has not been fully explored in the Canadian context and there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in order to foster a curriculum that positively supports all races, and does not look at Blacks through colorless lenses, stripping them of their identity and rendering them invisible within the classroom and the planned curriculum. The findings of this study show that parents engage in racial socialization behaviour through various means as they seek to teach their children about race and prepare them for facing and overcoming racism and other obstacles that may be a threat to their children thriving in a society where racism is ubiquitous. Farago et al. (2015) remind us that, discussing race and racism in early childhood environment is not without its challenges, however despite those challenges it is

important “for children to learn about their own group identities, as well as about the oppression and marginalization of groups of people throughout history” (p. 33). As researchers continue the dialog of race in early childhood settings, I am hopeful that the future of young Black children in early learning environment will improve as purposeful steps are taken to adopt curriculum and training that directly supports the healthy development of Black children in the early learning environment.

Participants Needed for a Study



Participants are needed for a study that is exploring black parents' perception on how their children's racial identity is represented in the early learning environment. If you are a black parent or a parent with a biracial child where one parent is black, we invite you to participate in the study.

If you are interested please contact the researcher Patricia Hall at (647) 927-0670

Patricia Hall
(647) 927-0670

APPENDIX B

Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

TITLE: Parents' Perceptions of Raising Healthy Black Children

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by Patricia Hall, B.A. as part of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies program at Ryerson University, and is being supervised by Dr. Rachel Berman, Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to explore how black parents or parents of black or bi-racial children socialize their children and their perceptions of how their children's identity is represented in their child's early learning environments.

WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Participate in one 45 – 60 minute interview at a mutually agreed upon location, possibly a public library or other suitable public areas. Some of the questions you may be asked are:

- What are some of the stories involving black characters that you read to your child?
- Do you discuss skin colour and hair differences with your child?
- What does being black in Canada mean to you?

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Participants will have the opportunity to share ways in which they parent their children and discuss their child's early learning environment as it relates to their child's identity. I cannot guarantee, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The potential risks are very low, however some of the questions could cause you to feel uncomfortable because of the personal nature of the questions asked, which may cause you to reflect upon unpleasant memories while responding to an interview question. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you may skip answering a question or stop participating, either temporarily or permanently.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The device used to record participants will be password protected and encrypted, and all audio recordings will be deleted after being transcribed by the research. All data/transcripts will be stored in a locked cupboard. After one year, transcripts will be shredded. The typed document will not be stored on the computer's hard drive but will be stored in a password protected file on a USB thumb drive and will be erased from the USB drive after one year. Results from this research may be shared at conference presentations or in scholarly publications, but will not have any personal information regarding your family's identity or the centre where your child attends, as pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants.

As is required by Ontario law, the researcher must report to the authorities any information regarding child abuse that is disclosed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time during the study. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator Patricia Hall or her research supervisor Dr. Rachel Berman, Closer to Home Childcare or Just For Kids Early Learning Centre.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact: Patricia Hall at patricia1.hall@ryerson.ca or Dr. Rachel Berman at rcberman@ryerson.ca or at 416-979-5000 Ext. 7695

This study has been approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

Parents' Perceptions of Raising Healthy Black Children

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand when these recordings will be erased and how data will be stored.

Signature of Participant

Date

Please indicate if you would like a copy of the interview/transcript to review and provide your feedback to the researcher.

Please check the box if you would like to have a summary of the final report emailed to you

Email address:_____

Thank you!



Signature of Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

Participant's age

Highest level of education

Number of children and ages

Age of your child or children that attend the childcare centre

Sex of your child or children that attend the childcare centre

Questions

I'd like to begin by asking you some questions about raising your child and your child's identity.

1. Do you read stories involving black characters to your child? If so, what are some of the stories?
2. Do you discuss skin colour differences and hair differences with your child? How do you go about this?
3. If you have a partner, do you parent in similar or different ways around this issue?
4. Are there other ways black identity is represented in your home?
5. If you can recall, how was black identity represented when you were growing up in your home?

Now, I'd like to ask some questions that involve your child's childcare centre.

6. Is your child's identity represented in the childcare your child attends? If so, how?
7. Is it important to you? If so, why or why not?
8. How would you like to see black identity represented in childcare centres?

I'd like to now ask a more general question.

9. What does being black in Canada mean to you?
10. Finally, is there anything we haven't discussed about the topic of raising your child and your child's identity that you would like to discuss?

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