Urban Education

Students "at Risk" : Stereotypes and the Schooling of Black Boys

Carl E. James

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://uex.sagepub.com/content/47/2/464

Additional services and information for *Urban Education* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://uex.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://uex.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://uex.sagepub.com/content/47/2/464.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Mar 12, 2012

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Dec 6, 2011

What is This?

Students "at Risk": Stereotypes and the Schooling of Black Boys

Carl E. James[1]

Abstract

This article examines how stereotypes operate in the social construction of African Canadian males as "at risk" students. Cultural analysis and critical race theory are used to explain how the stereotypes of the youth as immigrant, fatherless, troublemaker, athlete, and underachiever contribute to their racialization and marginalization that in turn structure their learning processes, social opportunities, life chances, and educational outcomes. The article concludes by suggesting that addressing the stereotypes is not only a task for educators but also for society as a whole.

Keywords

academic achievement, achievement gap, African American students, Black males, Canada, cultural responsiveness, high school, low expectations, race, teacher beliefs

Introduction

An ongoing concern among parents, educators, and youth in Canadian schools is the disengagement, poor academic performance, and low educational outcomes of Black male students (Abada & Lin, 2011; Caldas, Bernier, & Marceau, 2009; Codjoe, 2006; James, 2009), and the tendency, as a consequence, for them to be identified as youth "at risk" who need special

[1]York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Carl E. James, York University, 3150 Technology Enhanced Learning Building,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, M3J 1P3, Canada
Email: cjames@edu.yorku.ca

educational supports. And "in the name of instilling discipline," as Raby (2002) put it, the "at risk" discourse "justifies mechanisms of social control" (p. 431). Levin (2004) defined an "at risk" student as "one whose past and present characteristics or conditions are associated with a higher risk of probability of failing to obtain desired life outcomes" (p. 2). But often the "at risk" identification tends to be less about the probable learning needs of the youth and more about their deficits that make learning and their educational engagement and outcomes problematic (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). In fact, as Wotherspoon and Schissel fittingly argued, "The language of risk can serve as a euphemism for racism, sexism, and biases" based on factors such as class, immigrant status, family makeup, neighborhood of residence, cultural assumptions, and other "risk-inducing" constructs (p. 331). According to Haberman (cited in Milner, 2007), "Language is not an innocent reflection of how we think. The terms we use, control our perceptions, shape our understanding, and lead us to particular proposals for improvement" (p. 389).

Kelly (2000) saw the "at risk" discourse as "dangerous," for the process of identifying, mobilizing, and designating youth as "at risk" represents attempts to regulate and recode "institutionally structured relations" of class, gender, and race in ways that serve to make youth and their parents responsible for the youth's circumstances, opportunities, options, and life chances (p. 468). Indeed, as Fine wrote in her contribution to the book, *Children at Risk in America*, risk is not an abstract or rhetorical construct, but one in which people, groups, and communities are assessed on the basis of the values that society holds dear. Therefore, as the notion of risk increasingly permeates our "daily consciousness, educational practices, and bureaucratic policy-making," it is necessary to bear in mind that "the cultural construction of a group defined through a discourse of risk represents a quite partial image, typically strengthening those institutions and groups that have carved out, severed, denied connection to, and then promised to 'save' those who will undoubtedly remain 'at risk'" (Fine, 1993, p. 91).

In their examination of "students at risk" in Canada, Levin and Peacock, on the basis of the "vulnerability index,"[1] Canada's child poverty rate, and high school drop-out rate, estimated that one quarter of the student population were at "some definite vulnerability to risk." Poverty—assessed on the basis of the students' home situation and their neighborhood—was identified as a major contributor to, and indicator of, their being or becoming at risk. Individual characteristics that were found to contribute to the at-risk situation were personality traits such as being unable to work effectively with others; not having a sense of efficacy, autonomy, or resilience; and being

disobedient, or unable to sit still. The researchers also observed that parenting practices in terms of inconsistent routines for their children and not monitoring school performance or not encouraging high educational aspirations contributed to students' vulnerability to risk. In addition, teachers' and administrators' low expectations of students and their failure to provide needed support and assistance were also factors that contributed to risk (Levin & Peacock, 2004).

Understandably, there is a need to identify students who are at risk because of their failure to attend school, earn passing grades, comply with school discipline, and/or productively engage with educational expectations. From the perspective of schools, such identification might be seen as a means of helping to plan needed interventions for these students (Levin, 2004). Nonetheless, to date, there is little evidence in Canada, particularly in Toronto, that the intervention measures, such as mentorship programs, are having an impact on the "risky" practices and circumstances of students, particularly African Canadian (used interchangeably with Black) males. In fact, Black youth are counted among the most "at risk" students because of their continued disengagement from school, poor academic performance, and high rates of absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, and dropout, due in part to the school's "progressive discipline"[2] policies and practices (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Henry & Tator, 2010).

Why does this situation persist for Black males? Might it be because of education authorities' persistent disregard for, or unwillingness to acknowledge, race and racism as factors influencing students' gendered schooling and educational experiences—a perspective informed by the color-blind discourse[3] of Canada's multiculturalism? Such disregard might explain why schooling produces and maintains rather than reduces risk. I take schooling and education to be different though overlapping processes, and as Shujaa (1993) pointed out, "You can have one without the other" (p. 328). Schooling, Shujaa wrote, "is a process *intended* to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures" that support the socially sanctioned values, norms, and patterns of behavior that members are expected to learn to fully participate in the society. In contrast to schooling, education "is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next" the knowledge, values, skills, and traditions that will maintain its culture and ensure its survival (pp. 330-331). The schooling and education of Black youth could provide them with the required knowledge and skills of citizenship[4] to fully and equally participate in the society. But this becomes difficult when what they continue to experience is informed by a prevailing gendered at-risk discourse.

My intent in this article is to reflect, with reference to the literature, on the situation of African Canadian male youth who are often categorized as "at risk students" and whose abilities and behaviors are attributed to their culture. I focus on what I observe to be often unstated components of the "at risk" designation, that is, stereotyping and cultural attribution in the social construction of these "at risk" males. Through the conceptual lens of cultural analysis and critical race theory (CRT), I discuss how a "web of stereotypes" (Howard, 2008, p. 966) or "confluence of stereotyping" (Hernandez & Davis, 2009, p. 20) operates to racialize and marginalize these youth and structure their learning process, social opportunities, life chances, and educational outcomes. I take as significant my observations, and those of many scholars, educators, parents, and community members, that African Canadian students are frequently cited for disciplinary problems, placed (and in some cases, overrepresented) in special education classes as a result of behavioral concerns, and often labeled "at-risk" (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Raby, 2002). I reference the stereotypes of African Canadian males as immigrants,[5] fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers, noting how these stereotypes tend to reflexively serve to frame individuals' perceptions and discourses of these youth and, in the process, contribute to the very educational and social problems that the "at risk" identification is expected to address. Although these stereotypes are discussed separately here, they invariably overlap, intersect, and reinforce each other. Indeed, they form a web in which too many Black people are caught. I take up each of the stereotypes, following the discussion of the conceptual lens of cultural analysis and critical race theory (CRT) in the next section.

Conceptual Frames

Cultural analysis gives attention to the structures and traditions that we all help to create, producing the circumstances in which individuals find themselves. It is not about providing solutions to "likely false problems, but about sketching and confronting the conditions that tied problems and apparent solutions together" in ways that help to produce "more inclusive questions and more comprehensive answers" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 13). In their chapter, "Reconstructing Culture in Educational Research," McDermott and Varenne also made the point that if we are to fully understand and address the issues being investigated, then we need to take into account the cultural processes that underlie human interactions rather than merely focus on the individual. The idea, then, is not to conceive of individuals' problems

as simply a product of their own making but a product of the cultural worlds individuals occupy. As McDermott and Varenne asserted,

> Cultural analysis, like school reform, requires that we take persons seriously while analytically looking through them—as much as possible in their own terms—to the world with which they are struggling. It is not easy, but it is the best way to see them in their full complexity; anything less delivers a thin portrait of their engagements and leaves them vulnerable to being labeled, classified, diagnosed, blamed, charged, and found lacking without any consideration of how they have been arranged, misheard, unappreciated, set up, and denied by others. (p. 7)

Taking into account this complexity of individuals requires moving beyond the individual, the school, and the dichotomies (such as success/failure, male/female, White/Black) into which we tend to place individuals without taking into account the culture of society that shapes and is shaped by individuals. Indeed, as McDermott and Varenne pointed out, "We have no choice but to study that which we also make" (p. 23). As such, the question here is not what do Black boys do that cause them to become "at risk" students, but when are the categories of male and Black "made relevant [and] in what circumstances" (p. 21)? Gender and race mediate students' experiences and educational outcomes; hence, they are not simply words we use to identify and differentiate individuals. Rather, gender and race, in some cultural contexts, are used "to notice, regulate, and even distort individuals' points of order," making situations "dangerous enough to require constant vigilance" (p. 20).

Whereas cultural analysis directs us to examine how culture operates in the schooling experiences and outcomes of students, critical race theory (CRT) makes race, and its interlocking relationship with gender, class, and other demographic factors, central to any social analysis. As Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) wrote, "Critical race theory focuses on the all-encompassing web of race to further our understanding of inequality" (p. 3). According to Milner (2008), it is "concerned with disrupting, exposing, challenging and changing racist policies that work to disenfranchise certain groups of people" and, in the process, "maintain the status quo" (p. 333). And in today's context that status quo is maintained through a pernicious new racism that Balibar (2007) defined as "a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism, which at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of

certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions" (p. 84). All forms of racisms—from the individual to the institutional to the structural (or societal)—are maintained through the process of racialization, which is the categorization of individuals into groups with reference to their physiological characteristics (specifically skin color) and attributing abilities, cultural values, morals, and behavior patterns that reflect these characteristics (Henry & Tator, 2010). Racialization serves to essentalize, homogenize, and generalize about minority group members, thereby ignoring group diversity and intragroup differences, and, in the process, de-contextualize and de-historicize their experiences (Celious & Oyserman, 2001).

In relation to schooling and education, Howard (2008) wrote:

> CRT examines racial inequalities in educational achievement in a more probing manner than multicultural education, critical theory, or achievement gap theories by centering the discussion of inequality within the context of racism. . . . CRT within education also serves as a framework to challenge and dismantle prevailing notions of fairness, meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality in the education of racial minorities. (p. 963)

Hence, although today's liberal-minded educational authorities would have us believe that overt educational tracking, segregation, and biased grading are things of the past (an aspect of new racism), the fact remains, that the assessment, designation (e.g., at risk), and educational placement of students continue to be legitimized and reinforced by inequitable color-conscious school policies, rules, and practices (Gillborn, 2008; Raby, 2005; Solomon & Palmer, 2004).

Both cultural analysis and critical race theory enable a discussion about the intersection of race, gender, and class as they are lived, performed, experienced, and resisted in stratified societies where the culture is shaped, reshaped, and maintained by mechanisms such as racism, sexism, classism, and stereotyping. In the Canadian context, the national multiculturalism discourse sustains the myth of a color-blind, racially neutral society where culture is not informed by race[6] (Henry & Tator, 2010). But we cannot ignore the integral role that race, and concomitantly racism, plays in the lives of citizens. How then can we leave unexamined race-informed policies and practices that account for the fact that Black, Aboriginal, and Latino/a youth are most often identified as students "at risk" (Toronto District School Board, 2010) and that the tendency is for them to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system

(Tanovich, 2006)? In one form or another, our society has produced and continues to produce conditions where race matters and any attempts to reverse its significance or consequence requires acknowledgment of its place in our culture.

In a society where males' lives are structured by Anglo-white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity—the socially constructed set of ideals, norms, roles, values, and expectations for and of men (Leach, 1994)—it is expected that they would demonstrate and live up to the requisite dominance, strength, aggression, competitiveness, athleticism, and control (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; James, 2009; McCready, 2010). In situations where boys and young men are unable to live up to these masculine norms against which they are measured, invariably, they, as Kimmel (2007) asserted, will be "found wanting" (p. 76). In the case of Black males, the White hegemonic structure of masculinities against which they are measured not only serves to marginalize and racialize them but also, as a consequence, leads to what Kimmel referred to as "chronic terrors of emasculation, emotional emptiness, and gendered rage that leave a wide swath of destruction in its wake" (p. 75). Furthermore, according to Stevenson (2004), the racialized script that Black males are expected to follow is one "designed within white society's projected fears of Black manhood, not the self-determined efforts, experiences, and potential of Black manhood" (p. 13; see also Walcott, 2009). It is possible, therefore, that for many adolescent males who find themselves on the margins of schooling and society as a result of their subordinated racial and class status, the resultant performance of masculinity *is* the performance of "at riskness" as defined, understood, and legislated.

In terms of the analysis of the schooling experiences and outcomes of students, a cultural analysis directs us to examine how the educational institutions we construct create the many youth who become "at risk." The usage and meaning of "at risk" is imbued with cultural values that must necessarily be taken into account. Critical race theorists contend that the prevailing racist discourse within society operates in such a way that the designation of students as "at risk" is merely an indication that they need educational supports, guidance, and mentorship. But the supposed good intention of the "at risk" designation has become so normalized that it obfuscates the "inconspicuous and covert approach to issues of inequity that ambiguously suggest racial preconceptions" of Black and other racialized students (James, in press, p. 81). With regard to Black males, the "at risk" designation supported by the convergence of stereotypes of them as immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers, place them at a considerable disadvantage in school and society generally.[7]

The Stereotypes of Black Boys and Young Men

In what follows, I discuss the various ways in which the stereotypes of Black males—immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers—operate to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise young Black male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system. These stereotypes work together to affect educators' conceptions of the youths' abilities, skills, and aspirations and, in turn, the youths' responses to these categorizations.

As Immigrants

Africans' presence in Canada dates back to the early 1600s, and despite legislative attempts to bar their immigration and settlement in Canada for reason such as "inability to assimilate," they did manage to settle in Canada. In fact, the Census of 1901 indicates that some 17,500 (0.3%) "Negroes" resided in Canada at that time. By 1971 that number had doubled, and by 1981, with a change in the discriminatory immigration policies, the population had grown to an estimated 289,500. Today, the population of about 783,795 (2.5%) African Canadians is mostly of people who have been residing in Canada for more than two generations. They are descendents of slaves, United Empire Loyalists, and immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, Britain, and Latin America who came in the 1970s and the 1980s. With this profile, one would expect that today's young African Canadians—the majority of whom were born in Canada to Canadian parents—would not be asked the question "Where are you from?" as a means of establishing his or her foreign roots. Writing of this practice, Palmer (1998) maintained that "This probing of our ancestral roots keeps us forever foreign, forever immigrants to Canada" (p. v; see also Shadd, 2000).

Constructing those Canadians who are not of English or French-European ancestry as "foreign" is related to both the immigration and multicultural policies of Canada. As noted earlier, until 1971, Canada's immigration policies restricted non-White immigration. Bashi (2004) explained that "Canada's anti-black immigration policy" relied on "cultural and biological arguments" to justify their unsuitability to Canada. He writes that Canada was reluctant to admit Blacks because it meant that "the nation was just asking for problems (i.e., race riots) that Britain and the US had to bear for having black residents" (p. 586). This idea of fixed homogenous cultural behaviors among immigrants or ethnic and racial minority groups is also a feature of the federal multicultural discourse that holds that Canada's promotion of cultural freedom, democracy, and equality enables "cultural groups," that is, "Other

Canadians," to preserve and maintain their culture. The implication is that having preserved and maintained their culture, the values, beliefs, behaviors, and religious practices from their countries of origin, or whatever Blacks and other "foreign" Canadians do that seems inconsistent (in English Canada) with "Anglo-Canadian culture," are typically attributed to their foreign origin.[8]

In this context, stereotyped as foreigners[9] with cultures from elsewhere, young Black males' poor educational performance and disciplinary problems are not only attributed to their lack of Canadian educational values and discipline, due to their inability or unwillingness to assimilate, but also to their "foreign cultures" that do not value education. Hence, unaware educators will tend to take the position that nothing or very little can be done to help these youth. In such cases, educators and others might point to the prevailing statistics of test scores, special needs designation, the high drop-out rates, school disciplinary problems, and lack of parental involvement in their children's education as evidence that the situation is irreversible (Brown & Parekh, 2010; McKenzie, 2009). Added to this is the reality that many of the youth live in stigmatized, heavily policed, low-income urban neighborhoods populated by a significant number of immigrants with related issues of unemployment, poverty, limited school–community interactions, and negative media reports (Smith, Schneider, & Ruck, 2005; Young, Wood, & Keil, 2011; see also van der Land & Doff, 2010). The circumstances of their parents are seen as evidence of what can be expected for these youth in the future.

The tendency to homogenize the youth and ascribe to them immigrant status means discounting their diversity—in terms of their places of birth, ethnicities, histories, and parents' national origin. Indeed, although everyone might identify (or are identified) as African or Black Canadian, the reality is their parents and/or grandparents might be from Trinidad, Haiti, Antigua, Ghana, Kenya, Brazil, Eritrea, and many other countries. A common assumption among many (if not most) Canadians is that the Black people they meet are from Jamaica, and the accompanying stereotype is that they are an undisciplined group (Aguiar, Mckinnon, & Sookraj, in press). Notwithstanding the fact that Jamaicans make up the largest proportion of African Canadian population and, hence, are just as likely to be found in proportionally large numbers among Canada's legislators, professorates, scientists, teachers, and medical practitioners, the stereotype of them, that is, more generally, as the "Black foreigner"—simply based on skin color—persists. Furthermore, that a significant number of people deported[10] to the Caribbean are sent to Jamaica (as to be expected given their numbers)—a number of them young people

who have resided in Canada from early childhood—further helps to reinforce the stereotype.

The construction of African Canadians as immigrants, as people who are "inassimilable" and not law abiding, contributes to a sense of temporality that seems to characterize how they are dealt with in the society and in their schooling. This temporality is manifested in the fact that mainstream historical accounts, even after four centuries, do not tell of the presence of Blacks in Canada, and African History Month remains, in many cases, more an annual *event* for and about Black people. It is also reflected in educators' practices in which the resources used, references made, or stories told are of African Americans and/or Black people living in the Caribbean and Africa. Stereotyped as immigrants and given their absence from educational resources and curriculum, it is understandable that many of today's Black youth would eventually become disengaged from school and the educational process.

Simmel's concept of "the stranger" could also apply here. According to Simmel, strangers occupy a position in a society where they are both "near and far *at the same time*" and have relationships with other members of the society "founded only on generally human commonness." As such, they are "not really conceived as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type: the element of distance is no less general in regard to them than the element of nearness" (p. 407). In the Canadian context, although many Canadians might say, "except for Aboriginals, we are all immigrants," the same understanding of immigrant is not applied to African Canadians (and other racial minority Canadians) as it is to most White Canadians. The tendency is to think of Whites, particularly English and French people, as Canadians, and "visible minorities" as members of "cultural groups." What seems to be primary in the social position that African Canadians hold in the society is their "visibility" as African Canadians and not as "the individual bearer" (Simmel, 1908/1950, p. 408) of an invariable attribute.

In response to the stereotype of them as immigrants, some African Canadian youth tend to conform to the expectations whereas others reject the stereotype all together. In conforming, the youth adopt immigrant identities, the most common of which is discerned through their constructed Jamaican language, accent, and demeanor (Ibrahim, 2000). But taking on and performing this identity does not necessarily mean that the youth accept that they are not Canadians; rather they are, in part, demanding that their presence as African Canadians be acknowledged and accepted on their terms and that space for their expression of that identity be provided. Conceivably, their immigrant identities—likely informed by a combination of their immigrant parents' and grandparents' values and beliefs, and their own racialized

experiences—are, in some ways, reflective of their parents' aspirations and expectations of them having been socialized to have high educational aspirations and to work twice as hard to succeed in the society (Codjoe, 2006; Gosine, 2010; James, 2010). It seems plausible that for students raised by parents who place great importance on good academic performance and educational success for social mobility (James, 2010; see also Fuligni, 2001; Lee, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Qin, & Amthor, 2008), being classified as "at risk" would be, as they know, contrary to what their parents expect of them. It is up to educators and others, therefore, to understand the implication of the immigrant/foreigner stereotype, recognizing that even as African Canadian youth might appear to be conforming to the stereotype, they are in a way resisting it by using the stereotype to assert their agency within a system that seeks to label, define, and relegate them as foreign.

As Fatherless

Related to the stereotype of African Canadians as immigrants, with foreign values and morals, is the perception of their family structure as one in which single motherhood is the norm. And insofar as single parenthood does not provide the scope and opportunities (because of parents' limited income, time, and other resources) to fully engage with their children's education and schooling (such as helping with school work, monitoring school performance, and attending parent–teacher meetings), then, the children are seen as lacking the needed educational and social skills, aptitude, and discipline that put them at risk of failing in school. Usually, single-parent families are disparaged and judged as problematic in terms of their social and economic cost to society. A "kind of social pathology," wrote Dowd, characterizes the way in which single-parent families are presented in popular culture and public policies. Used as a euphemism for "problem family," the term conjures up notions of the family as part of the deviant, unstable "underclass" of a society that upholds the traditional nuclear patriarchal family as the norm. In this regard, the rise in the number of single-parent families is equated with the social decline and end of the "real family" (Dowd, 1997, p. 3).

According to Statistics Canada some 46% of African Canadian children (compared to a national average of 18%) are growing up in one-parent, typically single-mother, households (Statistics Canada, 2009). That these families are perceived to be "dysfunctional" and "producing damaged children" (Griffith, 2006, p. 129)[11] undoubtedly influences the concerns educators and other institutional agents express about the schooling and disciplinary problems of Black students. In 2007, a public radio (CBC—Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation) series entitled, "Growing up without fathers," featured a number of investigative reporters, educators, religious leaders, other professionals, and community activists insisting the "breakdown of the nuclear family" and the "absence" of fathers in the lives of Black boys were responsible for Black youth delinquent and criminal behaviors.[12] A recurring theme was that mothers were unable to provide the appropriate and necessary supports and guidance for their boys. One program guest, David Popenoe, stated, "The most widely reported statistic is that a child growing up without two parents has about twice the risk in life of having serious problems" (CBC, 2007). Chris Spence, with his experience as Director of Education in two public school boards in southern Ontario, suggested that in a classroom it is possible to identify students who are growing up in single-parent families because they are often "angry young men with little or no respect for themselves or others, poor academic skills, limited problem solving skills . . . [and] they viewed school as temporary incarceration" (CBC, 2007). The generally accepted "solution" to the "problem" of fatherlessness is for the youth to have Black male mentors as role models.[13] To this end, there has been a significant growth in role-model programs in schools and community organizations.

Accepting the idea that being fatherless contributes to delinquency among Black young men and that Black sons are not learning about manliness from the person considered best suited to teach them (Fraser, 2011; James, in press) also means accepting the corollary that mothers, who at times are portrayed as authoritarian, strict, and demanding,[14] are incapable of giving their sons the social and cultural capital needed to successfully navigate and negotiate the social and educational structures of society. But this corollary is not supported by the evidence that, in many cases, the accomplished men who promote the virtues and importance of men being there for boys were themselves raised by single mothers. The truth is, in most cases, even in nuclear families, it is mothers who are most often involved in the early years foundational socialization of children and are the ones who are most often involved in their children's school activities, like attending parent–teachers meetings (Fraser, 2011; James, 2010). Indeed, as Lawson-Bush (2004) wrote about the participation of Black mothers in their sons' lives, "no aspect or component of Black male life eluded these mothers in their ability to teach lessons that were necessary for manhood or the development of masculinity" (p. 384).

That Black men and women, and even single mothers, have come to accept the truism that boys, especially Black boys, need fathers physically present in their homes or lives is a reflection of the hegemonic discourse of the society.[15] This internalization of fixed gender roles undermines individuals' attempts to resist their racialization in their aspiration to be "good

mothers," and in the case of immigrant parents, their aspiration to attain the immigrant dream of making it—if not them, their children (Fraser, 2011; Smith et al., 2005). Moreover, Black and other racial minority parents, even the absent fathers, look to education as the means by which their children might become academically successful, socially responsible, and productive citizens. As such, we need to shift from the deficit paradigm that blames deficiencies in the family and look at what schools are not doing or lacking in their education of single-parent Black boys. Griffith (2006) indicated from her research in Toronto area schools that the prevalence of single-parent families in an area was one of the criteria used in classifying an "inner-city school" and its eligibility for extra funding. She contended that "the single parent family becomes just one of the many problems in the inner city school—one that can be identified but which has little currency in an educational setting that, by definition, deviates from 'ordinary' school" (p. 134).

Undoubtedly, the absence of fathers in the lives of Black boys means that they are not learning from the particular insights, aspirations, and experiences of their fathers. But the claims about, or overemphasis on, the limitations of the parenting skills of mothers, negate the crucial contributions that mothers have been making to the socialization of their sons. On this point in his response to *The Globe and Mail* newspaper series of paper on "Failing Boys," Haille Bailey-Harris (2010), a high school student, said the following:

> Every time I hear about another study telling me that, as a boy, especially a fatherless boy, I may be destined to fail in school, it makes me cringe and more determined to prove the researchers wrong. I'm one of those statistics discussed in the studies . . . . Raised by my mother alone, I'm a fatherless boy. . . . Although not discussed in the articles, I have what other studies said is also a risk factor for dropping out of school: I'm black. Hell I should throw in the towel! . . . Although I don't think the studies are always right, I agree that growing up without a father (especially if your family is also poor) can be a real challenge. And since we know this, we should be working hard to intervene before failing is a done deal. That's what my mother did (October 21, 2010).

Evidently, correctives to the "at risk" situation of Black youth cannot simply be found through fathers or "surrogate-fathers"—as in male teachers and other professionals as mentors and role models. The idea that being fatherless is inherent to the problems of underachievement and troublemaking behaviors comes close to suggesting, as Sevier and Ashcraft (2009) proffered, "that the presence of men is a necessary corrective to the damaging effects of

over-exposure to single mothers or other women" (p. 536). The idea can also operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy, thereby reinscribing the beliefs pertaining to the efficacy of African Canadian mothers (see Kim, 2009).

As Athletes

Athletics is seen as a way that youth who are "at risk" can surmount the obstacles and challenges they face in their communities and schools and as students engage school and not drop out. In the case of African Canadian athletes, who are habitually reduced to their bodies and their talent "attributed to nature" (Ferber, 2007, p. 20),[16] they face what Harry Edwards referred to as "double negative label" in that they are constructed as "dumb" athletes and "unintelligent" Blacks (Harrison, Sailesb, Rotichc, & Bimper, 2011; see also Singer, 2009). If they are good at sports, the stereotypical assumption dictates that they are also poor students. But we know that Black students do not arrive at school with an "anti-intellectual orientation" (Noguera, 2008). Rather, Black boys, for instance, as Hernandez and Davis (2009) mentioned, arrive with "high regard for their teachers" and "very optimistic" about their learning, but all this positive outlook on their education decreases as they go through school (p. 19). That Black students are not expected to do well in the classroom, but on the basketball court, is in part a reflection of the messages they receive from their teachers, coaches, and the hidden curriculum pertaining to racial stereotypes.

Numerous African Canadian male student-athletes have told stories of how they have been recruited for the basketball teams primarily on the basis of race and physicality. For instance, in an essay, "Why Is the School Basketball Team Predominantly Black?" (James, 2011), I referenced a newspaper report of an up-and-coming student-athlete, Dwayne. The reporter related that upon meeting Dwayne for the first time, the teacher who would become Dwayne's coach, "after seeing his size, encouraged him to take part in sports." About his athletic skills, the coach said, Dwayne is "very athletic, can dunk the ball, has a great vertical leap and seems to be comfortable playing the game," and he was impressed with Dwayne's "work ethic in sports" (pp. 452-453). Nothing was said of Dwayne's academic performance, but the reporter speculated that he is "on track" to get an "athletic scholarship" to study in the Unites States. Kevin, another student-athlete, recalled receiving a call from his older brother's high school basketball coach encouraging Kevin to remain at his current school—a school to which the coach would be moving to become the basketball coach. Kevin indicated that the coach had never met him and mostly knew of his basketball career through his brother and friends. That the coach

had confidence in Kevin's basketball ability might be explained by the coach's familiarity with the basketball abilities and skills of Kevin's brother, as well as an assumption of athletic abilities among siblings—a genetic reasoning and stereotype that often influences coaches and scouts in their recruitment of athletes (James, 2011).

Coaches and teachers are known to use racial stereotypes in their consideration of who will make the best basketball players. For example, in the essay referenced above (James, 2011), Amir, a South Asian high school student-athlete, is mentioned as saying that he was not given the same opportunities on the basketball court as his Black teammates because the coach expected him to get an academic scholarship, because the coach saw him as "very smart or highly intelligent." The coach, Amir said, showed preference for the Black players—he saw them as "natural" athletes and the ones who would win the athletic scholarships. For the coach to be convinced otherwise, as Amir put it, "I had to be extra good, faster, just to prove myself more than the Black players on the team because I was not Black" (James, 2011, pp. 454-455.). In many of Toronto's schools and neighborhoods, recruiting and enabling young Black men in their athletic pursuits, particularly in basketball and track and field, is influenced by the historical images of them as natural athletes—a myth that continues to persist (Ferber, 2007). Furthermore, as long as particular sports are perceived to be representative of the culture, as well as the interests, capabilities, and possibilities of Black young men, then it is these young men—especially those with the stereotypical physical characteristics—who will be recruited to be on sports teams (James, 2011).

In addition to their physicality, and oftentimes even more important than their academic performance in school, is the "coachability" (Ferber, 2007; Frey, 2004) of youth.[17] Being coachable is related to the extent to which the young men internalize the values and characteristics of a "good," reliable athlete, prove their athletic prowess, and remain consistent in their work ethic pertaining to the sport. In return, they will receive the needed support from coaches (especially if they are the "star" athletes) who, in many cases, working with the stereotype of the fatherless boy, act as "surrogate fathers." In such a situation, it is not the student's interest in mathematics, history, or chemistry that is important, but his performance, abilities, and skills in, for example, basketball, track and field, or football. There is cultural significance to the sport, for if you are Black you are not perceived to have the aptitude, skills, and physicality for hockey, which is regarded as Canada's "national" sport. Therefore, unable to play or excel in hockey can be said to represent not the failure of coaches and others to encourage and train Black youth in the sport but their inassimilability into Canadian recreational activities; hence, they remain

"foreign." In other words, stereotyped as immigrants or cultural outsiders means that African Canadian youth are likely to be thought of as having neither the interest, talent, capability nor discipline for hockey. But as Blacks, like their American counterparts, in the context of school, basketball and track and field are seen as "their" sports.

That Black students are successful in a particular sport becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that contributes to individuals' blindness in their use of the stereotype. In the case of coaches and teachers, it is proof that athletics provide the most productive opportunities for these students to participate in school. And for the youth, the attention, recognition, and adulation that they receive from their peers, coaches, scouts, parents, teachers, and the society generally, as well as the scholarship possibilities and offers they receive from postsecondary institutions, do not only inspire them to play sports (James, 2011; Singer, 2009) but are also reason enough for them to live up to the stereotype. There is also the argument that while attributing athletic competence to being Black males might be seen as a stereotype, because of what they might attain through athletics, it is often held up as a "positive stereotype." But the seductive nature of "positive stereotyping" masks the racism and structural inequity that exist in society, and as such, is often quite harmful (James, 2011). The experience of Dwayne, as discussed above is a case in point. The support he received from his coach, teachers, and the newspaper reporter serves to re-enforce that he is "on the right tract." As a consequence, his focus on basketball, to the exclusion of other educational or career pursuits, means that he is unlikely to develop many of the necessary skills that would enhance his social and economic life (see Singer & Buford May, 2010, for a discussion of a similar student-athlete).

Furthermore, in a society and schooling system where sports remain "the bastion of heterosexual masculinity and site of performance," playing sports has meant "fitting in, measuring up and becoming men" (James, 2011, p. 458). Undoubtedly, there is a high cost to living up to the stereotype, such as the inordinate amount of time, energy, and dedication given to learning, playing and mastering their sport, at the expense of their academic work. So too, the overvaluation of heterosexual masculinity not only serves to structure acceptable forms of masculine behaviors, traits, and roles (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; McCready, 2010) but also serves to limit the sporting options of Black male youth. But more to the point, as Harrison et al. (2011) stressed, "Far too often sport is framed as the red carpet pathway out of poverty and obscurity and into fame and fortune. While a few do achieve their dreams, the vast majority are rudely awakened at a point where they have forgone their opportunity to secure a valid and valuable education" (p. 100).

As Troublemakers

There is an apparent logic to thinking that students who lack the social support and cultural capital, because of their immigrant (or perceived immigrant) backgrounds, their fatherlessness, and inclination to athletic more than academic interests, are unlikely to do well in school. And in a society and related school system structured by individualism, any animated reactions by students that demonstrate dissatisfaction and frustration with the educational system's lack of attention to their needs, interests, and aspirations might be considered disruptive, troublesome, and/or disorderly. Consider also the association that is made between race, gender, and behaviors, especially in a context where the "immigrant" is an unfamiliar person with fixed characteristics. Therefore, in the case of Black young men, there will be a normalization of their behaviors; in other words, they will be stereotyped as troublemakers and undisciplined. In fact, in their popular text, *The Color of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*, Henry and Tator (2010) made the point that stereotypical images of certain racialized communities represented on television, in newspaper articles and photographs, and "the everyday discourses of politicians, police, and other public authorities" breathe fears about these group members. The authors continued to say that "the myths reinforce stereotypes of crime and criminality as 'a Black problem' or 'an Aboriginal problem.' . . . The rhetorical discourses of Black on Black crime have no parallel in terms of a matching discourse on White on White crime" (p. 15). The fact is historical and contemporary social images of Black people very much inform the youth's schooling experiences. And as studies indicate, stereotyping, regarded as racial profiling (so termed because of the ways in which race operates in constructing racialized youth as potential threat to safety and security), contributes to much of the problems and struggles students are experiencing in schools, specifically Ontario schools (Dei, 1997; James & Taylor, 2010; Solomon & Palmer, 2004).

The particular urban neighborhood in which students reside also contributes to the profile of the youth as problem-students. There is a tendency to associate their "problem" behaviors with the fact that they reside in stigmatized neighborhoods in urban areas—areas that receive disproportionately negative media attention that portray them as deprived, derelict spaces to be feared (Wacquant, 2008, p. 1).[18] In research that was conducted in one such Toronto neighborhood to learn of the schooling experiences of Black high school students, the participants reported that they were routinely stereotyped as "bad" or "troublemakers," and assumptions were made about their

academic abilities and behavioral motives based on their skin color, clothing, and the neighborhood. The students referred to their experiences as "racial profiling" by their teachers and school administrators who were disrespectful to them, did not take into account the students' particular circumstances when dealing with their complaints and/or action, and, in some cases "delivered" them to the judicial system (James & Taylor, 2010; Mosher, 2008). According to one Grade 11 male student, "Even at school teachers treat you differently. . . . Like if you're a Black kid walking through the hallway . . . they're expecting you to cause trouble or be bad" (James & Taylor, 2010, p. 127).

Referring to police officers who would come to their school, either on routine visits or because the principal called them about an incident, one male research participant surmised:

Once they [police] see what colour skin you have, you are bad news. . . . I could be walking in the neighbourhood and they think I am going somewhere bad and they just look at you like you have their shirt on, they just stare at you. They don't look at you as a person; they look at you as where you're from.

This participant went on to say that his neighborhood "might be known as a bad area," but seeing "a bunch of guys" together should not lead to "automatically think gang; or automatically think we're out there doing something bad with some drugs or smoking or doing something illegal" (James & Taylor, 2010, p. 128). Essentially, the youth in the study indicated that such stereotyping or racial profiling was so much a part of their lived experiences in the larger society, their communities and schools, that many of them seemed resigned to its consequences. They took for granted that they would be treated differently and "singled out" by teachers, principals, police officers, and hall monitors because of preconceived ideas of Black youth and also what they heard from others (James &Taylor, 2010, p. 127).

In many of these urban schooling contexts, in an effort to thwart students' potential insubordinate and disruptive behaviors, school administrators and teachers take what might be considered a "preemptive" stance by having security cameras, locked outside doors while classes are in session, and students dressed in uniforms. As well they enlisted the services of hall monitors, security guards, and/or police officers. These "preemptive" responses, according to Farmer (2010), are part of the criminalization of schools, which she describes as a "combination of reactive-disciplinary policies, surveillance, metal detectors, unwarranted searching and lockdowns that reflect the contemporary criminal justice system within the school environment" (p. 367).

The expectation of student violence or hostility leads to what Farmer described as a "moral panic" or "racialized moral panic" that is premised on the notion that African Canadian youth are unable to fit into the school norms. Hence, they behave in ways that conjure up anxiety among teachers and administrators concerned with school and classroom management, which is mainly about the importance of teachers "always being in control of student behavior" (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009, p. 3).

In response to this "moral panic" and resulting anxiety, educators take a "get-tough" approach, which is evident in things such as zero tolerance practices, for example, "time out" at the principal's office, detentions, suspensions, expulsions, which in turn produce "deficient narratives about the moral capacity of Black youth . . . and constrain the public moral imagination" of them (Farmer, 2010, p. 373). Furthermore, the get-tough approach, fostered by the construct of Black students as troublemakers, also has the effect of facilitating the "school to prison pipeline" (Henry & Tator, 2010; Meiners & Winn, 2010; Noguera, 2008; Solomon & Palmer, 2004)—a path in which schools have unwittingly played a role with their continuing surveillance of these "at risk" students whose criminalization is partly an outcome of their schooling.

As Underachievers

Despite the evidence that African Canadian students, encouraged by parents, have high educational and social aspirations (Gosine, 2010; Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2009; James, 2010; Smith et al., 2005), the stereotype of them as underachievers persists. What accounts for this persistence? Studies indicate that typically, Black youth, supported by their parents, enter school willing and able to engage in their learning process (Gosine, 2010; James, 2010). But they encounter an inequitable schooling system in which educators' approach to students' learning and an Eurocentric curriculum operate as impediments to many Black students' educational success. Thus, the degree to which the stereotype seems to be justified is not merely a result of Black students' lack of intelligence, skills, interests, or their immigrant or "Black culture" that is thought to be antithetical to academic pursuits. The stereotype of Black students being underachievers is maintained by the social context of schooling, teachers' attitudes and practices, and how Black youth themselves take up or act upon the underachiever stereotype.

In his study of the successful educational experiences and attainment of Black youth, Codjoe (2006) pointed out that for the most part, existing studies have tended to focus on their "poor academic performance" (p. 33). He reasons that these studies have been prompted by educators' and researchers' need

to understand the academic problems of Black students, but in some cases, the studies reinscribe the stereotypes of these Black students as lazy, dumb, athletic, stupid, intellectually inferior, deviant, dangerous, and mentally incompetent—all of which are presented as related to their "Black culture" (p. 34). These stereotypes are part of the deficit thinking about Black students, which acts as a trope against which they struggle as they try to productively engage with their education process. So to the question: Can Black students succeed in an education system in a society that views "them as perpetual academic underachievers?" Codjoe's findings indicated that, yes, it is possible, but they first have to build up their defense "against the inevitable psychological insults of racism" (p. 46). The resulting "self-identity and pride in African cultural/racial identity," said Codjoe, "positively affects academic success among black students by serving as an important buffer against racism and devaluation of African peoples, and providing students with requisite coping skills" (p. 48).

In many of today's schools, including those in Toronto, there is much concern about "the achievement gap" that exists among Black students, particularly males, and others in terms of their successful completion of high school (Toronto District School Board, 2010). In most cases, test scores and other standardized measures are used as evidence of students' ability, skill level, and knowledge of educational material[19]—as well as to identify "at risk" students. The overreliance on tests scores—both school and individual test scores—has the effect of stigmatizing schools and reinforcing stereotypes that might be addressed if educators focused more on the teaching and learning processes and not so much on test scores. "Too much testing and not enough teaching," as Milner (2010, p. 3) argued, will not eliminate the achievement gap. Besides, in schooling systems that purport to be taking into account the diversity of their students, standardization in terms of tests, educational materials, pedagogy, and content "is antithetical to diversity because it suggests that all students live and operate in homogeneous environments with equality of opportunity afforded to them" (p. 3).

Obviously, teachers play a pivotal role in the construction of students as underachievers and their designation of students as "at risk." There is an absence of Canadian studies that speak to Black parent–teacher relationships. In this regard, the insights that U.S. studies provide are instructive. The study by Lynn and his colleagues in which they examined "teachers' beliefs about African American male students in a low performing high school" found a substantial majority of the teachers attributed the students' academic failure to the students, their parents, their community, rather than to their teaching. They write that "about 80 percent of teachers argued that African-American

students' failure to achieve was primarily shaped by their lack of motivation to learn, their failure to attend classes, their lack of interest in learning, their lack of preparation for school, their inability to focus, their participation in street culture, and failure to behave appropriately in class" (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010, p. 308). The teachers submitted that parents were the "chief source of the problem" because they cultivated in their children "cultural mores and values" that were inconsistent with those of their school (p. 309). Such beliefs among teachers correlate to their practice of not engaging with parents and assuming the "parents do not have the time, interest, money, or energy to support what they are doing" at school (Kim, 2009). This assumption of parents' commitment to their children's schooling is seen as justification of their children's underachievement and ultimately the "at risk" designation.[20]

For their part, young Black male students either conform to, or resist, the underachiever stereotype. But there is a complexity in the ways this stereotype is taken up. There are those who conform, having come to internalize the underachiever and "at risk" designation, and believe that academic work is not for them. And there are those for whom conforming is merely a coping mechanism because doing otherwise would be to go against a system that they believe would never accept that they can be competent academic students. Some of these students tend to present themselves as athletes whose interest in school is "to play ball" (James, 2009). Those who resist the stereotype set out to challenge it; hence, they work "harder" to "prove" that they are not like their peers or to prove their teachers wrong. It is ironic that it takes the stereotype and the presence of their underachieving peers to motivate some students to do well in school. As one young man said, "You can allow things to govern your life or you can deal with them then, and just kind of move on and prove them [teachers] wrong" (James, 2010, p. 127; see also Howard, 2008).

Conclusion

Evidently, these stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system. The cultural context of schooling, with its Eurocentric curriculum, homogeneity in its approach to the teaching/learning process, and reliance on culturally inappropriate assessments, functions as an incubator of the stereotyping that takes place. So the idea that schools operate on principles of cultural freedom (or multiculturalism), democracy, merit, racial neutrality (or color-blindness), and

equality of opportunity is not borne out in the experiences of Black male students whose experiences in schools and society are affected by constructions of Black masculinities that are linked to fatherlessness, hopelessness, deviance, low expectations, and poor academic performance (Hernandez & Davis, 2009, p. 19; McCready, 2010). A "color-blind" approach to working with students effectively conceals and obscures the preconceived ideas that inform educators' understanding of the learning needs and interests of particular students. Hence, in the case of Black males, popular media images and their physical appearance combined with low grades (perceived to be a lack of interest in academic work) have at times been used as "good" reasons to encourage such students to join sport teams. Color-blindness also serves to negate the social and cultural capital that students bring to school and to their learning (Lynn et al., 2010; Yosso, 2005).

In Canadian schools, stereotyping, including the "at risk" designation, operates in a context informed by a multicultural discourse that masks the fact that race matters. As such, race and, concomitantly, racism inform educational policies and practices, which is contrary to educators' claims of neutrality and objectivity in their work with, and expectations of, Black male students. Stereotyping remains a major issue that continues to limit the educational opportunities, possibilities, and successes of these students. That some of these youth actively resist and contest schools' policies and practices that construct and label them means that they come up against structures that invariably caused them to employ or display the very behavior patterns that earned them the stereotypes in the first place and which they seek to eliminate. The sad irony is that because of these behavior patterns—for example, poor academic performance and disruptive conduct, which are the basis for their "at risk" designation—teachers and others come to feel justified in the "truth" of their stereotypes and assessments. What is needed is for educators to recognize how the hegemonic schooling policies, programs, and practices perpetuate stereotyping that are oppressive to racialized students, who through their paradoxical responses and actions seek to register their needs, concerns, and interests so that their schooling experiences can be meaningful, self-validating, relevant, safe, and empowering for them.

This "web of stereotypes" in which Black students are caught is part of the cultural structure of society in which they and their teachers operate. Indeed, as McDermott and Varenne (2006) pointed out, "It takes a culture full of people to make such a mess" (p. 19). The mess in this case is a schooling situation where preconceived ideas and formal evaluation measures supported by an inequitable social structure contribute to gendered labels from which it is difficult for many Black male students to escape. According to Noguera

(2008), understanding and debunking racial stereotypes and challenging the systems that maintain them are not just the tasks of teachers, principals, "role models," and education leaders but of the entire society. Perhaps what needs to be central to our educational policies and programs is not the formative or summative evaluation measures and disciplinary management, but a differentiated approach to students' learning and problems that gives attention to their lived experiences and the social context in which they are positioned as Black boys and young men and accordingly expected to learn, understand, and perform their masculinity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Taken from using the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth's (NLSCY).
2. In 2007, Ontario Ministry of Education acknowledged that the zero tolerance policy "could have a disproportionate impact on students from racialized communities," and as a result, the policy was replaced with the "progressive discipline" policy, which promotes "in-school detentions, peer mediation, restorative practice, referrals for consultation, and/or transfer [to another school]" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 213).
3. In the Canadian discourse, culture, and not race or color, is believed to account for differences and diversity among people. But the irony is, in practice, culture is read unto bodies of those who are racially different, or in Canadian parlance, "visible minorities." By default race or color is used to represent difference.
4. Shujaa (1993) listed some of these skills to be literacy, numeracy, humanities, technology, critical thinking, "understanding of the political system," and historical knowledge of their own society and others (p. 331).
5. Whereas the refugee experience is different from that of immigrants, I will not go into this difference, since for the most part unless students are from known refugee-producing countries like Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia, educators and others tend to treat them as immigrants. Moreover, the vast majority of Black youth have parents and grandparents who came as immigrants—in Toronto, they are mostly from the Caribbean.

6. One of the criticism of Canadian multiculturalism is that "it leads to the hardening of ethnic and 'racial' stereotypes" (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2010, p. 161), which also functions to position them at the margins of the society, preserving "the cultural hegemony of the dominant white cultural group" (Henry & Tator, 2010, p. 39).

7. Howard (2008) and Hernandez and Davis (2009) similarly discussed African American males.

8. State multiculturalism, argued Mackey (2002), "implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture, and that other cultures become 'multicultural' in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture" (p. 2).

9. Similarly, Lee (2008) wrote that Asian Americans are stereotyped as "perpetual foreigners."

10. The reasons for deportation are typically related to being in Canada illegally and convictions related to criminal activities. The young people who get deported are often because they are permanent residents and a conviction makes them ineligible for citizenship.

11. Drawing on her experience, Griffith explained that "as single parents, we rarely see ourselves as socially deviant. Rather, our concerns are often about money, how our children are growing and maturing, the kind of adults they are becoming, and so on. Our children's experiences of schools are always a hot topic. We are often puzzled by some of the difficulties our children encounter in school. We speak about school problems with other single parents without necessarily being able to understand or resolve the issues" (p. 128).

12. Writing of the "criticisms of contemporary forms of black womanhood and manhood" leveled by Boston-based religious leader Eugene Rivers, Walcott (2009) stated, "Rivers message was well received, given its embeddedness in neoliberalism's individual managerial language of personal responsibility with little recognition of a collective responsibility and a common social good" (p. 79).

13. Elsewhere (James, in press), I refer to mentors and role models as "corrective agents" borrowing Patrick Shannon's (1998) term. I concur with Sevier and Ashcraft (2009) who argue that a gender analysis is necessary if we are to avoid the "simplistic sex-role socialization" that a "surrogate-father" is what boys need without paying attention to "what kinds of masculinities we wish to model" (p. 536).

14. Gosa and Alexander (2007) also said this of African American mothers, and they go on to point out that "there is great diversity in black family life . . . and wide variation in the socialization experiences of black children" (p. 295).

15. In a *Toronto Star* article, "Where Are the Men?," based on observations and interviews with single mothers—mostly Black—in public housing, Linda Diebel (2007) reported that for the most part the women were "raising children on little

money, often in public housing where kids are exposed to greater risks, because it's all they can afford."

16. On the other hand, the accomplishments of White athletes are credited to their "fortitude, intelligence, moral character, strategic preparation, coachability, and good organization" (Coakley, 2006, cited in Ferber, 2007, p. 20)

17. See Singer's (2009) discussion of the role and responsibilities of coaches in helping student-athletes to realize their academic potential (pp. 40-43).

18. Wacquant (2008) continued to make the point that "owing to the halo of danger and dread that enshrouds [these communities] and to the scorn that afflicts their inhabitants, a variegated mix of disposed households, dishonoured minorities and disenfranchised immigrants, they are typically deprived from above and from afar in somber and monochrome tones (p. 1).

19. That tests are also seen as a means of holding teachers accountable, begs the question: accountable to whom—which parents, and which students?

20. The assumption of parents' lack of commitment is contrary to the evidence that minority and working-class parents seldom question the authority of teachers and rely on them for direction pertaining to the educational aspiration and needs of their children. The distance that parents keep from school can also be seen as their attempt to avoid the surveillance to which they are subjected (McGhee, Hassrick, & Schneider, 2009).

References

Abada, T., & Lin, S. (2011). *The educational attainments and labour market outcomes of the children of immigrants in Ontario*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Aguiar, L. M., Mckinnon, A., & Sookraj, D. (in press). *Racialization and the repertoires of racism: Reaction to Jamaicans in the Okanagan Valley*.

Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2010). Intersectionality, critical race theory, and American sporting oppression: Examining Black and gay male athletes. *Journal of Homosexuality,* 57, 949-967.

Bailey-Harris, H. (2010). 16-year-old: I'm fatherless, black, but no "failing boy." *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved October 24, 2010, from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/failing-boys/16-year-old

Balibar, E. (2007). "Is there a "neo-racism?" In T. Das Gupta, C. E. James, G.-E. Galabuzi, & C. Andersen (Eds.), *Race and racialization: Essential readings* (pp. 83-88). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Bashi, V. (2004). Globalized anti-blackness: Transnationalizing western immigration law, policy, and practice. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 27(4), 584-606.

Bhattacharjee, A. (2003). *Paying the price: The human cost of racial profiling*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Brown, R. S., & Parekh, G. (2010). *Special education: Structural overview and student demographics* (Research Report). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Research and Information Services, Toronto District School Board.

Butler, B., Joubert, M., & Lewis, C. (2009). Who's really disrupting the classroom? An examination of African American male students and their disciplinary roles. *The National Journal of Urban Education & Practice, 3*(1), 1-12.

Caldas, S., Bernier, S., & Marceau, R. (2009). Explanatory factors of the black achievement gap in Montréal's public and private schools: A multivariate analysis. *Education and Urban Society, 41*(2), 197-215.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (2007). *Metro morning* (Transcript—Growing Up Without Fathers). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Author.

Celious, A., & Oyserman, D. (2001). Race from the inside: An emerging heterogeneous race model. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 149-165.

Codjoe, H. (2006). The role of an affirmed black cultural identity and heritage in the academic achievement of African-Canadian students. *Intercultural Education, 17*(1), 33-54.

Dei, G. J. S. (1997). Race and the production of identity in the schooling experiences of African-Canadian youth. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 18*(2), 241-257.

Diebel, L. (2007, August 19). Where are the men? *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved June 29, 2011, from http://www.thestar.com

Dowd, N. (1997). *In defense of single-parent families*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Farmer, S. (2010). Criminality of Black youth in inner-city schools: "Moral panic," moral imagination, and moral formation. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 13*(3), 367-381.

Ferber, A. (2007). The construction of Black masculinity: White supremacy now and then. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues, 31*(1), 11-24

Fine, M. (1993). Making controversy: Who's "at risk"? In R. Wollons (Ed.), *Children at risk in America* (pp. 91-110). New York: State University of New York.

Fraser, N. (2011). *Guilt trippin' and the mothering of Black boys in Toronto*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Frey, D. (2004). *The last shot: City streets, basketball dreams*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Fuligni, A. (2001). A comparative longitudinal approach to acculturation among children from immigrant families. *Harvard Educational Review, 71*(3), 566-578.

Gillborn, D. (2008). *Racism and education: Coincidence or conspiracy*. London: Routledge.

Gosa, T., & Alexander, K. L. (2007). Family (dis)advantage and the educational prospects of better off African American youth: How race still matters. *Teachers College Record, 109*(2), 285-321.

Gosine, K. (2010). Accomplished Black North Americans and antiracism education: Towards bridging a seeming divide. *Critical Sociology*, 1-15.

Griffith, A. (2006). Constructing single parent families for schooling: Discovering an institutional discourse. In D. E. Smith (Ed.), *Institutional ethnography as practice* (pp. 127-138). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Harrison, L., Sailesb, G., Rotichc, W. K., & Bimper, A. Y. (2011). Living the dream or awakening from the nightmare: Race and athletic identity. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 14*(1), 91-103.

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2010).*The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Nelson Education.

Hernandez, K. C., & Davis, J. E. (2009). The other side of gender: Understanding Black masculinity in teaching and learning. In H. R. Milner (Ed.), *Diversity and education: Teachers, teaching and teacher education* (pp. 17-30). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Hernandez-Ramdwar, C. (2009). Caribbean students in the Canadian academy: We've come a long way? In F. Henry & C. Tator (Eds.), *Racism in the Canadian university: Demanding social justice, inclusion, and equity* (pp. 106-127). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Howard, T. C. (2008). Who really cares? The disenfranchisement of African American males in prek-12 schools: A critical race theory perspective. *Teachers College Record, 110*(5), 954-985.

Ibrahim, A. (2000). "Whassup homeboy?" Black popular culture and the politics of curriculum. In G. S. Dei & A. Calliste (Eds.), *Power, knowledge and anti-racism education: A critical reader* (pp. 57-72). Halifax, UK: Fernwood Publishing.

James, C. E. (2009). Masculinity, racialization, and schooling: The making of marginalized men. In W. Martino, M. Kehler, & M. B. Weaver-Hightower (Eds.), *The problem with boys' education: Beyond the backlash* (pp. 102-123). New York, NY: Routledge.

James, C. E. (2010). Schooling and the university plans of immigrant Black students from an urban neighborhood. In H. R. Milner (Ed.), *Culture, curriculum, and identity in education* (pp. 117-139). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

James, C. E. (2011). Why is the school basketball team predominantly Black? In S. Tozer, B. Gallegos, A. Henry, M. Bushell Greiner, & P. Groves Price (Eds.), *Handbook of research in social foundations of education* (pp. 450-459). New York, NY: Routledge.

James, C. E. (in press). Troubling role models: Seeing racialization in the discourse relating to "corrective agents" for Black males. In K. Moffatt (Ed.), *Troubled masculinities: Reimagining urban men* (pp. 77-92). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

James, C. E., & Taylor, L. (2010). The making of at risk students: How youth see teachers thwarting their education. In C. C. Smith (Ed.), *Anti-racism in education: Missing in action* (pp. 123-136). Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Kelly, P. (2000). The dangerousness of youth-at-risk: The possibilities of surveillance and intervention in uncertain times. *Journal of Adolescence, 23*, 463-476.

Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review, 4*, 80-102.

Kimmel, M. (2007). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame and silence in the construction of gender identity. In N. Cook (Ed.), *Gender relations in global perspective: Essential readings* (pp. 73-82). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Lawson-Bush, V. (2004). How black mothers participate in the development of manhood and masculinity: What do we know about black mothers and their sons? *Journal of Negro Education, 73*(4), 381-391.

Leach, M. (1994). The politics of masculinity: An overview of contemporary theory. *Social Alternatives, 12*(4), 36-37.

Lee, S. J. (2008). Model minorities and perpetual foreigners. In M. Sadowski (Ed.), *Adolescents at school: Perspectives on youth, identity, and education* (pp. 75-84). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Levin, B. (2004). Students at-risk: A review of research. *Educator's Notebook: Reviews of Research of Interest to Educators, 15*(3), 1-4

Levin, B., & Peacock. K. (2004). The quality of public education in Canada: Students at risk. *The Learning Partnership, 2*, 1-8. Retrieved from http://www.tlpresources.ca/policy_research/Progress_Report2004en.pdf

Lynn, M., Bacon, J. N., Totten, T. L., Bridges, T. L., & Jennings, M. (2010). Examining teachers' beliefs about African American male students in a low-performing high school in an African American school district. *Teachers College Record, 112*(1), 289-330.

Mackey, E. (2002). *The house of difference: Cultural politics and national identity in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

McCready, L. T. (2010). *Making space for diverse masculinities: Difference, intersectionality, and engagement in an urban high school*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

McDermott, R., & Varenne, H. (2006). Reconstructing culture in educational research. In G. Spindler & L. Hammonds (Eds.), *Innovations in educational ethnography* (pp. 3-31). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McGhee Hassrick, E., & Schneider, B. (2009). Parents surveillance in schools: A question of social class. *American Journal of Education, 115*, 195-225.

McKenzie, K. (2009). Emotional abuse of students of color: The hidden inhumanity in our schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 2*(22), 129-143.

Meiners, E. R., & Winn, M. T. (2010). Resisting the school to prison pipeline: The practice to build abolition democracies. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 13*(3), 271-276.

Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher, 36*(7), 388-400.

Milner, H. R. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytical tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*(4), 332-346.

Milner, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Mosher, J. E. (2008). Lessons in access to justice: Racialized youths and Ontario's safe schools. *Osgoode Hall Law Journal, 46*(4), 807-851.

Noguera, P. A. (2008). *The trouble with Black boys: And other reflections on race, equity, and the future of public education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Palmer, H. (1998). *But where are you really from? Stories of identity and assimilation in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Sister Vision Press.

Raby, R. (2002). A tangle of discourses: Girls negotiating adolescence. *Journal of Youth Studies, 5*(4), 425-448.

Raby, R. (2005). Polite, well-dressed and on time: Secondary school conduct codes and the production of docile citizens. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 42*(1), 71-91.

Satzewich, V., & Liodakis, N. (2010). *"Race" & ethnicity in Canada: A critical introduction*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.

Sevier, B., & Ashcraft, C. (2009). Be careful what you ask for: Exploring the confusion around and usefulness of the male teacher as male role model discourse. *Men and Masculinities, 11*(5), 533-557.

Shadd, A. (2000). "Where are you really from?" Notes of an "immigrant" from North Buxton, Ontario. In C. E. James & A. Shadd (Eds.), *Talking about identity: Encounters in race, ethnicity, and language* (pp. 10-16). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Between the Lines.

Shannon, P. (1998). *Reading poverty*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Shujaa, M. J. (1993). Education and schooling: You can have one without the other. *Urban Education, 27*(4), 328-351.

Simmel, G. (1950). The stranger. In K. Wolff (Ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (K. Wolff, Trans., pp. 402-408). New York, NY: Free Press. (Original work published 1908)

Singer, J. N. (2009). Preparing African American male student-athletes for postsecondary education: Implications for educational stakeholders. In H. R. Milner (Ed.),

Diversity and education: Teachers, teaching and teacher education (pp. 31-50). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Singer, J. N., & Buford May, R. A. (2010). The career trajectory of a Black male high school basketball player: A social reproduction perspective. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 46*(3), 299-314.

Smith, A., Schneider, B. H., & Ruck, M. D. (2005). "Thinking about makin' it": Black Canadian students' beliefs regarding education and academic achievement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 34*(4), 347-359.

Solomon, P., & Palmer, H. (2004). Schooling in Babylon: When racial profiling and zero tolerance converge. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 33*, 13-26. Retrieved from:www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/solomonpalmer.html

Statistics Canada. (2009). *Canada's ethnocultural mosaic: 2006 census*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Author. Retrieved June 14, 2009, from http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/ethnicorigin/pdf/97-562-XIE2006001.pdf

Stevenson, H. C. (2004). Boys in men's clothing: racial socialization and neighbourhood safety as buffers to hypervulnerability in African American adolescent males. In N. Way & J. Y. Chu (Eds.), *Adolescent boys: Exploring diverse cultures of boyhood* (pp. 59-77). New York: New York University Press.

Suárez-Orozco, C., Qin, D. B., & Amthor, R. F. (2008). Relationships and adaptation in school. In M. Sadowski (Ed.), *Adolescents at school: Perspectives on youth, identity, and education* (pp. 51-69). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tanovich, D. (2006). *The colour of justice: Policing race in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Irwin Law.

Toronto District School Board. (2010, May). *Achievement gap task force draft report*. Student and Community Equity Department. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Author.

van der Land, M., & Doff, W. (2010). Voice, exit and efficacy: Dealing with perceived neighbourhood decline without moving out. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, 25*, 429-445. Retrieved from: http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/media_room/docs/AchievementGapReptDraftMay172010.pdf

Wacquant, L. (2008). *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Walcott, R. (2009). Reconstructing manhood; or, the drag of Black masculinity. *Small Axe, 13*(1), 75-89.

Wotherspoon, T., & Schissel, B. (2001). The business of placing Canadian children and youth "at-risk." *Canadian Journal of Education, 26*(3), 321-339.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community wealth and race. *Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Young, D., Wood, P. B., & Keil, R. (Eds.). (2011). *In-between infrastructure: Urban connectivity in an age of vulnerability*. Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada: Praxis(e) Press.

Zamudio, M. M., Russell, C., Rios, F. A., & Bridgeman, J. L. (2011). Critical race theory matters: Education and ideology. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bio

Carl E. James is the Director of the York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC) in the Faculty of Education, York University. His research interests include examination of issues of equity, particularly in relation to access and inclusivity in the schooling of marginalized youth, and the place of sports in their educational outcomes.