Countering Stereotypes and Enabling Resilience: Ethiopian Male Perspective on Their Educational Experiences in Canada

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Abstract

This article examines how stereotypes of Black males and Black masculinity operate in the construction of the Black male of African descent in the Canadian educational context. Specifically, the study discussed here examined how this archetypal frame informed the lived experience of second-generation Ethiopian males in relation to race, academic performance, ambition to achieve their desired future goals, and integration into Canadian society. From qualitative interviews conducted with 11 second-generation Ethiopian males, the study found that stereotypes of African cultural identity and its cumulative effects in their developmental years, along with culturally specific protective factors by way of family, nurturing relationships, and robust social support systems equipped them with the ability to nurture their potential and build on their abilities and skills, to enable them to continue to work toward realizing their future aspirations. The findings have implications for how social workers/counsellors in educational or clinical contexts can better advocate for a more expansive curriculum and support Black male students of African descent in their pursuit of educational success to enable a healthier pathway to integration.

Keywords: African Canadian, Ethiopian, racialization, integration, male, education, well-being

Schools serve as powerful agents of social mobility and socialization. They are leading institutions of cultural transmission, where students learn the values and beliefs of the school's culture and society at large (Adeyemo, 2022). A prevailing view of education emanating from historical and present-day experiences is that one particular culture must be accepted as the dominant one and the standard within the school system's structure (Dei et al., 2022; Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). Within the Canadian context, European experiences (both historical and contemporary) have been "presented as dominant and as the monocultural standard for academic, personal, and social socialization" (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2001, p. 80; see also Dei et al., 2022). To this end, educational theorists and researchers have postulated that in its practice to inculcate pupils into this cultural macrosystem, schools perform the function of "sorting machines" wherein pupils are classified, sorted, and tracked according to their ethnicities, abilities, and needs (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Dei et al., 2022; Oakes, 1982; Rist, 1970; Tyack, 1993). This invariably poses a significant challenge for groups, such as Black males of African descent, who have historically rooted difficulty with the educational system that has, according to the extant literature, rendered their educational experiences to one that is based on "maintaining order and discipline rather than student learning and academic achievement" (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 7; see also Adeyemo, 2022; Nartey & James, 2022).

Such an approach habitually frames Black males of African descent as requiring control and as being a problem. These perceptions will likely follow them throughout their educational lifespan and into adulthood (Dei et al., 2022). Moreover, these perceptions are likely to be of concern during their adolescent years (ages 10–19) when the critical transition from middle school into high school occurs. This transition represents a shift from an elementary setting (a child-centred environment, usually with one teacher) to a larger environment with "departmentalized courses, multiple teachers, and larger student populations" (Lozier 2013, pp. 6-7) in a critical time in students' development as they are seeking for "deeper relationships with peers and adults" (Lozier, 2013, pp. 6–7) whilst "trying on various identities" to inform their decisions about their career paths (Musto, 2019, p. 389).

Given this context, it is unsurprising that a myriad of research and extensive public discourse surrounding Black males have focused on the challenges they have experienced through a deficit perspective that highlights the numerous ways they have been adversely affected by systemic factors within the educational system and beyond (Carey, 2020; Goff et al., 2014; Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2003; Wint et al., 2022). While such an exclusive focus is valid, it can also obscure the resilience and strengths these students embody to improve their educational and career outcomes. This article presents findings from a more extensive study that explored the integration experiences of second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean youth into Canadian society. This study explored how cultural and structural experiences associated with living in hybridity (being of two cultures: Ethiopian and Canadian or Eritrean and Canadian) informed how participants defined and practiced well-being. In particular, this article examines the obstacles encountered by second-generation Ethiopian males during their time in school, the

support they needed, while also considering their experiences with race and racialization, and how they navigated this marshland to nurture their potential and build on their abilities to realize their future imagined aspirations. The article begins by providing a brief overview of the historical construction of the Black male identity and its contemporary relevance in the Canadian context. This is followed by a presentation of the methods employed in this study and its ensuing findings. The article concludes by discussing the implications for social workers/counsellors in educational and clinical settings.

Framing/Constructing the Black Male Identity: A Brief Overview

Race is one of the most significant sociodemographic distinctions worldwide. The construction of contemporary racial ideology emerged during the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). Sentiments and ideologies during this period were constructed on bigoted beliefs that utilized "science" and nature to generate "truths". These mendacities have in turn shaped "notions of race, and more specifically the racial dynamics of superiority and inferiority" (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016, p. 3). Within this paradigm, Black males were inherently constructed to be ill-equipped to procure the human and social resources needed for personal and professional advancement because of the "presumed attitudinal dispositions they adopted in reacting" to their historical and contemporary plight (Young, 2021, p. 438). As part of this construction, it is equally important to recognize the role of other sociodemographic variables, such as gender and class, in further inducing this superiority and inferiority duality. These "truths" of racial ideology, coupled with other sociodemographic variables, seeded the racism that is today embedded in and practiced at both institutional and individual levels. The intricate nature of this web can best be understood by adopting an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality provides the tools required to unpack the construction of Black males and their relationship to historical views of race, class, and gender. More specifically, an intersectional lens discerns the transition from the 'brute,' which pixelated "Black males in the 19th and early 20th century, to the 'thug' that brought about criminalization in the late 20th and early 21st century" (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016, p. 4).

Accordingly, Ladson-Billings (2011) troubled the relationship between Black males and the educational system by presenting the dichotomy that informs the construction of Black males and how this, in turn, shapes how systems interact with them. Naming the proverbial elephant in the room, Ladson-Billings's (2011) framework illuminated the love-hate relationship with Black males that society, if not the world, has. When it comes to the "love" side of the coin, she postulated that this is displayed in the manner in which mainstream societies across the world embrace the various cultural forms that are either dominated or engineered by Black males. This includes and is not limited to poetry, clothing, language, style, music, sports, arts, and dance, which render Black male youth culture the most marketable cultural form in the world (Price, 2006). The typological message that this attaches to "young Black men is that they are seductive and intriguing," thus constructing them as both "dangerous (taboo, forbidden) and sensual" with

an image that synchronously renders them "appealing and repulsive" (Ladson-Billing, 2011, p. 9).

The "hate" side of the coin sees Black males as a "problem" that needs to be reined in and, if ineffective, then "eradicated." The extant literature has determined that Black males tend to be identified as being concerned with education. It has been determined that Black males tend to be identified as the primary contributor to most issues in schools and society (Nartey & James, 2022). This is fueled by historical racial ideologies that became intertwined with other sociodemographic variables such as their language, their dress, and their effect. Conversely, Black males command immense social power by their presentation, and this discomfits educational institutions that function as sorting systems because the presence of Black male students challenges such authority. Simply put, the hate aspect of this dichotomy is one wherein it appears certain that "if they would not act so … Black they would not be problems" (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 9).

Such attitudes render Black male students acceptable in narrow niches and specific slots (sports and music), and should they appear in other places – such as on debate teams, the honour roll, or in tech clubs –they would be considered the exceptions or the oddities. The category of exception also serves to perform the function of not belonging to either, in the sense that when the exception shows up in those "unexpected spaces, society is quick to announce his or her exceptionality to everyone, especially their peers, to further re-inscribe the notion that these individuals are 'special'" (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 9). The proclamation of being "special" also evokes a differentiation wherein they are marked to be different from members of their community, thus alienating them from other Black people and placing them in positions of psychological danger. The psychological danger is awakened in the alienation they experience when placed in the exception category, especially at a time in their development when they need their student peers, thus leaving them without social anchoring. This invariably has the potential to set Black male students up for turbulence in their social lives because of its detrimental impact on their social and emotional development (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Musto, 2019; Spencer, 2008).

The Canadian Context

Canada's immigrant population currently makes up about one-quarter of the population. This figure gives Canada "one of the highest ratios for industrialized Western nations" (Cheatham & Roy, 2023, para. 5). To this end, immigration is a primary driver of Canada's economic growth, and, over the years, the federal government has continued to steadily increase its immigration targets in order to strengthen the workforce and offset an aging population. The policy of multiculturalism supports the realization of this plan, as it shapes and informs the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and equality by building an imagery that advertises a cultural and social mosaic (Millar, 2017).

Despite the growing diversity of the Canadian population, for the most part, the educational system continues to sustain a dominant Eurocentric approach to teaching and learning, even as Indigenous Peoples of Canada are calling for a systematic decolonization of systems and structures (Dei et al., 2022; Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). For example, scholarship has shown that Black students in the Greater Toronto Area (Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, East York, York, and Toronto) tend to have poor academic performance (Nartey & James, 2022; see also Black Legal Action). Within this group, Black males have been identified as having poor academic performance because of being stereotyped as being more interested in sports than in academics, which results in these students being streamed into non-academic educational programs and left lacking the required credentials they need to apply for and enter postsecondary institutions (Briggs, 2017; Dei & Kempf, 2013; James, 2019; James et al., 2017; Taylor, 2021). According to the literature, this has revealed the lack of diversity (inclusive of knowledge) among teachers who may be interacting with Black male students and seeing them as a monolith based on the historical construction of Black immigrants (James et al., 2017; Maynard, 2017).

However, in the Canadian context, it is noteworthy that the category Black includes many diverse groups of people from nations worldwide. According to Statistics Canada's 2022 census data, 1.5 million people from over 300 different cultural and ethnic origins reported being Black, with the majority being born in Africa (32.6%) or the Caribbean (21%). Immigration that is a result of global social, political, and economic instability, along with easier access to education, is the principal driver of racialized populations in Canada, with 23.7% of Black newcomers migrating to Canada between 2016 and 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Thus, Canada is home to a dynamic African Canadian, African, Caribbean, and African American communities with shared historical and contemporary experiences; with simultaneously diverse histories, biographies and worldviews that are shaped by culture and geography.

Education has been established as a crucial component of upward mobility for Black immigrants and their descendants. For the most part, this perspective is culturally enshrined by immigrant parents who tend to organize family life in such a way that not only is education revered, but also the culture and discipline of learning become part of the household's daily practice (Goitom, 2016; Dei et al., 2022). To this end, immigrant parents invest a great deal of personal and financial resources (tutoring, residing in neighbourhoods with better schools) in their second-generation children to ensure they have access to the means necessary for a successful future (Goitom, 2016; Dei et al., 2022). However, the literature also has noted that Black male students in the Canadian context often refer to the prejudiced construction of "Black and male" as producing an experience where they "find schools to be alienating spaces where teachers have low expectations of them and make little or no attempt to ensure that educational curriculum, pedagogy, and materials are inclusive or relevant to their experiences" (James, 2019, p. 376; see also Taylor, 2021).

Despite the range of demographics among African immigrant children (first and second generation), the education system "generally [does] not recognize their presence or that presence is only poorly reflected in classroom decisions and curricular planning" (Kiramba et al., 2023, p. 3). For instance, many of these children are multilingual, which shapes how they understand the world, learn and relate to the curriculum. Not being acknowledged as having these skills and worldviews can be a gateway to students' disengagement from the educational process, their poor academic performance, and their high rates of absenteeism or dropping out due to pedagogical and disciplinary policies and practices, which further fuel the "at risk" discourse of Black male students (Dei et al., 2022; Kiramba et al., 2023; Maynard, 2017; Taylor, 2021). Conversely, very little research speaks to how these second-generation African Canadian youth navigate this cross-cultural educational experience.

Considering this, the study examined the obstacles encountered by second-generation Ethiopian males during their time in school, the support they needed while also considering their experiences with race and racialization, and how they navigated this marshland to nurture their potential and build on their abilities and skills to enable them to realize their future aspirations.

Study Design

This paper is part of a more extensive study that endeavours to provide an understanding of how second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean youth navigated their integration, considering their cultural and structural circumstances that were associated with living in hybridity (i.e., being of two cultures: Ethiopian Canadian and Eritrean Canadian). Although this paper only contends with the experiences of Ethiopian males who participated in this study – as no other male participants identified as Eritrean – the method section will begin to detail the data collection and analysis process of all 40 participants of this study and through this action present how the narratives of the Ethiopian males distinguished themselves.

The qualitative research approach was selected because the research question provides opportunities to gather information about the "human" side of an issue (Teherani et al., 2015). This systematic inquiry into a social phenomenon in natural settings gives way to learning more about how people experience aspects of their lives, how interactions shape relationships, and how individuals and/or groups behave. This qualitative research paradigm also effectively identifies intangible factors, such as social norms, religion, education, socioeconomic status, gender roles, and ethnicity and how these factors shape/inform people's experiences in manners that may not always be apparent (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). This allows researchers to examine "why events occur, what happens, and what those events mean to the participants studied" (Teherani et al., 2015, p. 669).

In line with the qualitative research paradigm, the research question "What are the integration experiences of second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean youth in Canada?" encompasses multidimensional explanations of the human experience, in addition to the constant

relation that exists within social and cultural systems (Gall et al., 1996; Goitom, 2016), and carried two core points for consideration.

First, arriving at a comprehensive understanding of the participants' integration process required an understanding of the lived experiences of their families (parents or extended families), of their ethnic communities (in Canada and ancestral homeland), and of the broader Canadian context. The influence of family, community, ancestral homeland, and country of birth (Canada) on identity development and how this informed integration were important conceptual pieces to understanding how participants forged their sense of self and guided their integration.

Second, because the research question implied an explanatory purpose in discovering this process, the qualitative research tradition of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) was congruent with this research question's discovery mode and explanatory orientation (Goitom, 2016). Furthermore, CGT explicitly focuses on generating new theories through inductive analysis of the data gathered from respondents, which aligned with the aims of this project. As, this study did not venture to establish objective facts about the social world, but instead endeavoured to explain how research participants would understand, or make sense of, their lived experiences using iterative data collection and analysis (Goitom, 2016; Charmaz, 2000).

Sampling in CGT is fostered to refine concepts and fashion them as theoretical constructs. To this end, researchers using CGT purposively select participants that produce data that bridges conceptual apertures in formal theory development, thus demonstrating that data collection and analysis happen jointly and interactively (Goitom, 2017; Charmaz, 2000). Data analysis "relies on the inductive approach that is embedded in the explanation of a phenomenon and is developed" through "open coding categories and then, through axial coding, to interrelate these categories that represent phenomena" (Creswell, 1998, p. 209; see also Goitom, 2017). Therefore, in searching for phenomena, researchers "are looking for repeated patterns of happenings, events or actions/interactions that represent what people do or say, alone or together, in response to problems and situations in which they find themselves" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 130; see also Goitom, 2017).

Data Collection

To participate in this study, potential respondents had to meet three global criteria. First, they had to be children of first-generation parents who were either Ethiopian, Eritrean, or both. Second, they had to have been born in Canada or arrived in Canada in their infancy (ages 0–5). Third, potential participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 30. This third criterion ensured that potential participants could reflect and articulate the experiences and knowledge relevant to the study. Likewise, the maximum variation strategy was employed because this study was interested in capturing common patterns in participants' integration processes. This approach facilitated the deliberate selection of a heterogeneous sample and the opportunity to observe their commonalities (Goitom, 2017; Patton, 1990).

Participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling, by posting recruitment notices throughout various community businesses and organizations. To maximize the diversity of the sample beyond this, a reputational sampling technique was employed to gain access to additional social networks by wide advertising in geographical locations (both physical and online) that potential participants frequented. These spaces included barbershops/hairdressing establishments, religious institutions, restaurants, community events (i.e., celebrations of Ethiopian or Eritrean national holidays), youth-centered organizations, and Instagram/TikTok/Facebook pages (i.e., popular social media pages with a large following and high volume of engagement). The theoretical saturation point reached 30 participants; however, data collection was seized at 40. This was because the study drew broad interest in the community, and 10 participants had already expressed their intention to participate when saturation was reached.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Because the interviews occurred during the "end tail" of the COVID-19 pandemic and in-person research protocols remained remote, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded, ranged from 75 to 120 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality agreement. The research team determined pseudonyms at random for each participant. Before each interview, each participant was asked to complete a consent form and a demographic information sheet that asked for details about their gender, age, occupation, education, religious affiliations, socioeconomic status, and marital status. The semi-structured interview questions consisted of a standard set of open-ended questions that focused on participants' family history of migration, transnational engagement, and experiences of settlement/integration in Canada. The questions also focused on their conceptions of what it meant to be "Ethiopian," "Eritrean," "Canadian," or living in "hybridity"; their experiences with "well-being" and "race and racialization"; their conceptual understanding of "race and racialization," how they defined and practiced it, and how it was understood within their family and community. Next, participants were asked how these experiences informed their integration process.

All participants received a renumeration of $25 gift certificate of their choice (i.e. Uber Eats, DoorDash, grocery store, Starbucks, Shoppers, Indigo Bookstore, etc.) in acknowledgment of the time and effort they have provided in participating in the research. All procedures performed in this study adhered to the ethical standards of the Office of Research Ethics (ORE), where ethics approval was granted. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred through the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the data was broken down into first-level concepts. This is an interpretive process whereby examining, comparing, and categorizing data was

cautiously executed through team meetings after interviews, listening to each interview shortly after it was conducted, and then re-examining the transcribed data sentence by sentence. In this stage, data analysis also consisted of careful reviews of researcher memos and observational notes taken at each interview by the research team. In order to better understand the integration experiences of the participants, the study emphasized that the interaction of social, political, and economic contexts over time needed to be considered to have better insight into their human development. To focus on this principle, it was necessary to use an intersectional life course approach to guide the interview. This design highlighted the life course theory principles by incorporating "historical time and place, developmental processes, timing, linked lives, and human agency" (Wint et al., 2022, p. 183).

We accomplished this by engaging in key-words-in-context (KWIC) analysis and noting words participants used most often to describe how they understood their parents' immigration and settlement experiences, how they reared them, and the role that the ethnic community plays in this process. In congruence with the extant literature on immigration and settlement of Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples, participants repeatedly referred to the challenges incurred by their parents. They spoke about the importance of recreating community in the host country as a means of affirming their identity while also creating space to have/raise a family. Most often referred to language to articulate this, this included: 'parents' experiences with racism, labour market exclusion; establishing a community here – places of worship and other gathering spaces (restaurants, stores, associations) as a means of creating some form of normalcy/familiarity during settlement: inclusive of creating resource sharing mechanisms (i.e., employment, housing, information sharing on how to raise children outside of their homeland), place to physically and emotionally connect with their culture/heritage (Ethiopian, Eritrean) in a foreign land, were narrated by participants to relate their understanding of their parents experiences and that of the larger community.

These narratives compelled us to ask questions of the data to reflect on what meanings we should make from it. Subsequently, we diagnosed gaps and provided leads for further data collection (Charmaz, 1990). For example, asking questions such as 'What is happening here?' or 'What does this represent?' (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) assisted in identifying and labeling pieces of data. Given this, participants were asked how they understood their experiences of hybridity and navigate the integration process in light of the fact that they noted their parents/communities were strong in their identities and had experiences of racism and exclusion. Key words utilized by participants included having a personal 'strong sense of pride in their heritage' (being Ethiopian or Eritrean). This was attributed to how they were raised, but for the male participants, considering their experiences with prejudice and racism in the school system, they relied on how they were raised as a means to build strength and shield themselves from these negative experiences. Words used included: 'culture', 'history', 'religion', 'transnational activities' as well as 'it doesn't matter that I was born here because they treat you like an outsider', and 'having historical knowledge of my heritage and how they

defeated attempts of colonization, is helpful in knowing what I need to do to realize my future goals'.

The researcher memos and observational notes allowed for more systematic and rigorous data analysis via line-by-line coding. Furthermore, the constant comparison method was useful as this process allowed for the streamlining of too many names that describe similar phenomena (Goitom, 2017). Thus, theoretically comparable events, actions or interactions were consolidated as there was a cautious commitment not to fit data into predetermined categories and codes but rather to allow the codes and categories to directly emerge from the data. This was conducted to highlight key phrases that represented themes with similar coded phrases grouped. This resulted in a list of emerging themes and categories for further reduction into clusters by grouping similar themes.

In the second stage, axial coding, concepts, and categories identified in open coding were further defined, particularly in how they accurately represented the data in their emerging relationship. Examples included paying particular attention to and identifying and grouping other words and phrases noted as central to how the participants described their experience of the phenomena under study, or the associated effects/consequences. Here, themes were compared against one another to develop categories and investigate the identified categories' dimensions and characteristics. For example, for the Ethiopian male participants, they expressed connections between their experiences in the school system in their early to adolescent years. This included: 'totalizing curriculum on Blacks', 'treated differently due to not fitting stereotypes of Black males or Africans', 'not picked to answer questions', 'looked at with suspicion', 'seeing other Black students being shut down when presenting different perspectives on the heterogeneity of Blackness/Black experience', 'preferential treatment of non-Black students' and participant spoke extensively about learning about their ancestral history and points of divergence and convergence within Africa and African diaspora.

Re-reviewing the data from these codes, we observed that they point toward the male participants describing some form of experience with race/racialization connected to the creation of some form or invisibility/erasure as it relates to the homogenization of Blackness. After this, we asked of the data, what actions, or potential actions did the Ethiopian male participants take as a result of their experiences of this phenomenon. The strategies employed by the Ethiopian male participants to address their 'experiences with race/racism/racialization' included 'anchoring themselves in their heritage, history', 'visits to their ancestral homeland to counteract prejudicial narratives of Africans that showcases heterogeneity in Blackness', 'belonging to and access to an ethnic community where they can tap into the experiences of other youth to combat isolation and a this being a source of resilience', 'ethnic community as a place to cultivate nurturing relationships', 'other racialized immigrant friends as a protective factor against racial discrimination by way of commonality of experiences', 'staying quiet because pushing back against teachers would derail their future plans', 'staying quiet because they are staying

grounded by drawing on history, culture, family, and friends to stay focused on achieving their goals beyond school (future oriented)'.

Furthermore, we asked of the data what the consequences of those strategies employed were and this included narratives of being viewed with further suspicion and moments where their assignments were questioned for authenticity because they chose to remain 'quiet' in the classroom. Additional consequences included a sense of personal gratification in having developed some form of 'resistance by being quiet' to get through these experiences. This was claimed as having allowed them to 'maintain on their grind', 'continue to plot for the future without being held back because of some presumed infraction or other' and although they were born and raised in Canada, their experiences in school (i.e. absence of diversity in curriculum, teachers lack of awareness of the wealth of cultural heritage and diversity of Blackness resulting in differential and dismissive treatment) does not 'make them feel Canadian or welcomed' thus informing how they integrate into the larger Canadian society.

In the final stage of analysis, the process of selective coding, the categories and their relationships were combined to create a "storyline" to describe "what happens" in the phenomena being studied (Goitom, 2017). As such, although stereotypes of African cultural identity and the cumulative effects it had in their developmental years in the school system, participants leaned on culturally specific protective factors by way of family, nurturing relationships, and robust social support systems to equip them with the ability to nurture their potential and build on their abilities and skills for the purpose of enabling them to realize their future ambitions. As part of the verification process, two focus groups with 10 participants in each were conducted as a "back-talk" – defined as engaging "the participants' interpretation on the researcher's interpretations" (Cardano, 1997, p. 65 as cited from Frisina, 2006, p. 2). Beyond a validation process, back-talk acts as an investigation of "second-order" (Lanzara,1991) and endeavors to "meta-communicate" the research (Ranci, 1998, p. 52 as cited from Frisina, 2006, p. 2) by primarily "decolonizing" the discourse of the "other" (i.e., participants) by integrating them into the knowledge-generation process "to re-discuss the interpretive categories of the researcher" (Frisina, 2006, p. 2). Participants indicated that the findings accurately expressed and captured their lived experiences during the focus groups.

Findings

Forty second-generation Canadian Ethiopian and Eritrean youth residing in Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario participated in this study. This article focuses on 11 participants who identified as second-generation Ethiopian males, as no other males identified as second-generation Eritreans. Of the 11 second-generation Ethiopian males who participated, their average age was 27. Table 1 provides a summary of the male participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Summary of the Male Participants' Demographic Information

Variable	Results
Total Sample	11
Avg. Age	27
Highest Degree/Level of School Completed	7 = BA/BSc 1= College Diploma 1= Master's Degree 1 = Professional Degree
Employment Status	10 = Full time 1 = Part-time
Marital Status	1 = Married 8 = Single 1 = In relationship
Live at Home/ Roommate + Avg. Income	2 = Live at home with ≈ $130, 000 3 = Live with roommates ≈ $36k
Live with Partner + Avg. Income	1 = ≈ $130,000
Live Alone + Avg. Income	5 ≈ $73,750
Languages Spoken Fluently	All = English 8 = Amharic 1 = French 1 = Tigrinya
Religious Affiliation	2 = Preferred not to say 4 = Ethiopian Orthodox 4 = Pentecostal 1 = Agnostic

From the transcripts of the 11 interviews conducted with the young men, complexities in their educational experiences as Black males of African descent across their developmental years in the educational system emerged as a significant category. Within this category, interrelated concepts particularized the social and cultural experiences of these second-generation Ethiopian young men during their integration process. Two of these concepts were (1) stereotypes of African cultural identity and their cumulative effects in their developmental years and (2) how culturally specific protective factors by way of family, nurturing relationships, and robust social support systems equipped them with the ability to nurture their potential and build on their abilities and skills for the purpose of enabling them to realize their ambitions.

Schooling Experiences in Their Developmental Years

The participants took on a global approach to their reflection and recounting of their early years – in particular, their preschool years (ages 3–5), elementary years (ages 6–11), and

adolescent years (12–17 years), and how their experiences during those pivotal years informed their sense of self and shaped how they integrated into society. Participants talked a great deal about how their early formative years were spent living in newcomer neighborhoods (i.e., public housing) with many other immigrant families that, like their families, were working to find their footing in Canadian society. Participants shared that, although they attended school in predominately newcomer areas, looking back, there tended to be a bias in how their African cultural identity and their racialized peers were viewed. When looking back on those years, most participants classified their preschool years as a time that began to shape their future. As Biruk and Adam respectively shared,

> There was this heritage celebration kind of an event at my primary school and we were asked to bring cultural artifacts and food our cultures etc. We had to let the teacher know in advance what we were bringing etc. I wore one of our traditionally embroidered shirts and my mom packed some Injera [traditional food] but vegan dishes. The teachers reactions to it [the food] was … let me say unwelcoming? She [teacher] made a face, moved from my presentation quickly and was more open to other dishes that came from other Black kids' cultures. I guess she was more 'familiar' with that let's say? It wasn't just me though. I noticed it with other kids from Africa like my classmate from Cameroon and Kenya. My thing is, how are you going to have this heritage learning day and actually kill the learning by creating this scale of acceptable Black meal and not acceptable one? This kinda set the tone for me in that place.

> My mom was telling me that one of the reasons we moved to [states neighborhood] was because they were noticing that I was not being interacted with at school as much. She did a lot with me growing up to make sure I was doing things that I should be at that age but that she was not seeing positive growth in me at school outside of her because the schools around there were not really interested in getting to know us. She would pay attention when she dropped me off and picked me up to see who the teachers were more interested in and it was telling. She tried when she could to volunteer like in school trips or other school activities so that they could see that I was a cared for child whose parents were involved. She also told me that at the time, aside from other African children, I was the only Ethiopian one and she wanted to try and open up opportunities for them [teachers] to know us so it translates better for me. At one point she said that she brought it up to the teacher and she did not like the response she received. She [mother] said that her observations were dismissed and her attempt to relate the importance of my education were not welcomed.

By the time they were in elementary school, most participants had already or were beginning to move to new and comparatively better-situated neighbourhoods than those of their

earlier years. In elementary school, unlike preschool, the participants were more aware of their classmates and the overall experience of the classroom. They shared how the lack of diversity in the school affected their well-being and that, for the most part, the curriculum and other educational materials were not responsive or culturally relevant in advancing their learning needs, expectations, and interests. Eskender and Daniel respectively relate their experiences:

> Aside from better, safer neighborhoods, some of the drawbacks of moving to the suburbs is how less diverse your neighborhood is and by extension, your school. What was jarring was the learning or lack thereof to be honest. The curriculum in my view was super European. Like the content, for example, history. We learned about the world wars, its impact on Europe etc. but no mention of how this impacted everyone else? Like the 'Scramble for Africa' as just an example of the outcome if you will of these wars?! Like during Black History month why not show the wideness of Black history? Battle of Adwa for example [Italo-Ethiopian war of 1896 where Ethiopia defeated Italy's attempt to expand its colonial empire]. If you try to bring in those missing pieces of the curriculum you know, by raising your hand and making connections between what the teacher is saying and how this relates to the rest of the world, and do it like softly, not even close to saying they are wrong, they would get pissed no joke! I know because I tried. I even asked if I could expand the assignments a little just to look at other books and I was told 'everyone has to do the same assignment'. Not even considering or encouraging this to me said that they [teachers] themselves don't know the subject matter and by default they create this hostile environment where you are treated as a problem or could be seen as one or feel unwanted because you are different than what they know.

> There was me and three other guys – Indian, Chinese, and Iranian. We gravitated toward each other because we had similar experiences [exclusion]. Because I am tall, the teachers would say things like use those long legs [play basketball]. And I don't like to play basketball at all! Black History Month [teacher] would constantly look at me for acknowledgement?! And the weirdest part is how when you try to explain that not all Black guys are into sports or that Black history is actually so much more, richer, diverse, it's strange, they get defensive and start to say things like they were being complementary! But it was actually negative comments about Africans, Blacks. I just decided to stay quiet, go to school, do my thing, and not engage beyond that because I didn't want this back and forth.

During their adolescent years in high school, participants shared their awareness of their teachers' misperception of their behaviour (quiet, not talking much in class) and how this could promote the view that they were disengaged or disinterested in the learning process. This negatively affected their academic outcomes both in direct and indirect ways. Michael explained:

> The stereotypes – they thought they were subtle, you know, saying it in a way that seemed supportive in case they got called out. I saw how the other African-Black

students would push back, and they were right; they were calling out the differential treatment, like not being selected to answer a question even though you had your hand up! I just got tired of it. I just decided to be chill, to concentrate on my schoolwork and move on. Because I didn't say much or anything, teachers looked at me with suspicion. Like they didn't trust me, if it's not that, then other teachers would use me as the example in the classroom and that would get me noticed as a different Black because I did well. It was unfair and uncomfortable to be labelled this way because I suspect they wanted to push back on the other Black students.

Culturally Specific Protective Factors: Role of Family, Nurturing Relationships, and Strong Social Support Systems

Relationships can affect academic achievement during the crucial developmental years, especially within the educational context (Musto, 2019). Participants shared how their racialization by the system was in direct conflict with that of their racial socialization at home. They shared instances where clashes between those two differing worldviews manifested in the classroom, leading them to shelter themselves by staying quiet and concentrating on their academic literacy to weather those years. As Sam and Haile shared respectively,

I learned a lot about world history in our discussions at home. So I learned about Blackness differently as something to be proud of, which helped a lot because, at school, the treatment is more about difference being good only to the extent that it does not overshadow them. And especially if you are African-Black, then the expectation is that your cultural identity had to be lowered, second place. I also got to visit Ethiopia as a child and that was really different because I got to see lots of family, history, stories and that changes you. When you experience that, you just know that what they say at school or how they treat you or see others like you treated is limiting, and it serves them, not you.

Yeah, honestly, I just didn't bother with them [teachers] anymore. How I see myself and how others who *know* me and relate with me tells me that they [the teachers] are not worth engaging with. They can hold on to their precious ideas or teaching materials or whatever because in the real world, most of this is irrelevant because it's narrow! At that point for me, it was about getting what I needed to get [finish school and go to university] so I can go pursue what I had pictured for my future. I'm not there yet but it's happening you know. So I kept it pushing because like I said, I have my own plans, and I'm not trying to validate them by getting into it with them and having it derail what I had planned. I mean, think about it though, how can you call a place that doesn't even want to admit that it's teaching limited material a place of learning? Like not all Black history is

one of struggle and just because someone disagrees and shows you otherwise, does not make them aggressive. It's laughable … but in a sad way.

Participants' discussion about the socialization and re-education around race and racialization at the family and social group levels was an ongoing process that required constant knowledge of their past and awareness of their changing contexts (i.e., growing older). Part of their ability to reframe their experiences wherein they could pull on positive levers beyond what was offered at the school level resided not just in their family support systems but in the relationships they developed with their peers in school who shared similar experiences. Jacob explained:

What was helpful for me was that I had friends who had different ethnic backgrounds. This type of negative stuff brought us together, but we used it for good. We learned about each other's cultures, families, and we had a lot more in common. Our families are immigrants, we have a strong culture of education at home and, we saw that as a good thing. We studied together, hung out, and went to university together. We are still friends. We just ignored them [the teachers] for the most part and only listened to things that we felt [were] useful.

Along with the relationships they were able to forge at school with pupils with similar experiences, participants shared how having a strong Ethiopian community was an important factor that helped them to understand the obstacles they were facing and harness resiliency. Marcus shared:

I grew up surrounded by Ethiopians. So, I got to see various expressions of Ethiopian culture and Blackness from my community but also outside of that through the friends I had at school. What was nice about the community part is that when we got together at various events us kids would talk. We would ask each other questions about school and what was going on. I was relieved to hear similar experiences because I felt like okay, I am not a problem even though I knew I wasn't doing anything wrong, but also sad because that was part of our experience. It made is easier to talk with others like me and for us to share how [we could] go through this safely and continue forward. Not everyone was okay, and could do it, but for me, it was helpful.

Discussion

Findings from this study reveal how participants understood their position within the hierarchy of students in their school and how educators held stereotypes about Blackness, which contributed to their interactions with their teachers and could have negatively affected their academic performance or overall disposition toward school. This was evidenced in the "quiet

deal" that participants struck with themselves and educators. In contrast, others tried to correct stereotypes in the curriculum propagated by teachers without success. Others observed how their peers continued to attempt such correction but were branded and handled as a "problem." Given the power imbalance, they concluded that the best course of action was to make themselves as invisible as possible to survive. According to Haberman (1991), the ability to strike such a bargain is allegorical to an absurdly diminishing standard that schools set for Black boys. For the most part, teaching traditionally constitutes the following core functions: "giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers and giving grades" (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 13; see also Haberman, 1991). These activities have the potential to generate a positive outcome. However, as in the case of the participants, when "taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts, they do not work" (Haberman, 1991, p.294). Instead, they become reflective of what is termed a "pedagogy of poverty", powerful in its capacity to define "the way pupils spend their time, the nature of the behaviors they practice, and the basis of their self-concept as learners" (Haberman, 1991, p. 294). Ironically, this is a kind of pedagogy whereupon a student can "succeed" without being involved but who then faces the consequence of exclusion.

This type of conclusion wherein learners like the participants of this study come to "strike a deal" is not accidental. Rather, the learning environment inclusive of the pedagogy and educator's uptake of the teaching process subconsciously leads students to such an approach often as a last-ditch effort/coping mechanism or act of forbearance to succeed in their education in environments where they feel powerless, unsafe, and threatened. Moreover, this subconscious bargain with the self and with the teachers also speaks to the type of control that is levied over Black males and is indicative of an approach that illustrates the teachers' ignorance of not only the full range of pedagogical options that exists but also the range of learners who may be aware that there is more to learn but who may be in a disadvantageous position and cannot ask for more without suffering the consequences (Kiramba et al., 2023). For example, participants narrated how their attempts to rectify perceptions of Black history from one that is deficit-oriented to one that is more inclusive of its history and contemporary contributions were ignored, or how their racialized peers were not selected in class to respond to questions, or how their efforts to counter stereotypes and tropes in the pedagogy and their teachers' actions resulted in the imposition of arbitrary or capricious rules (i.e., disapproving with a knowing authority), which targeted all of them in ways that had deleterious effects and acted as a method of control.

Given the increasing number of African immigrants who are making Canada their home, it is imperative that educators and social workers/counsellors in schools or clinical settings acknowledge the wealth of cultural heritage, diversity, and educational experiences (including how they are tutored at home) these children come with, irrespective of whether they are first-generation children or second-generation. For instance, in the case of Ethiopian

immigrants and their descendants, they hold a unique heritage wherein Ethiopia has never been colonized by European powers. This rare status is facilitated by the Ethiopian forces defeat of the Italian army at the Battle of Adowa in 1896, that this study's participants referred to in their narratives. Because of this, the country "has a long history of voluntarily pushing modernisation in the context of development' whereby it unlike other previously colonized countries in the continent and beyond "has taken charge of its own developmental trajectory" (Hailu, 2020, p.1). As such, participants' heritage is not something that they can discard or be expected to shelve; instead, it is an intricate component of how they function and see themselves in the world, and it informs how they develop their sense of self and negotiate how they can carve out a space in society (Kiramba & Oloo, 2019).

Typically, children of African immigrants tend to be "racially classified demographically (in both educational and research contexts)" and placed within the broad category of Black (Kiramba et al., 2023, p. 3; see also Dei et al., 2022). Yet, the category of "African" also often discounts the prodigious cultural diversity across the continent and, therefore, results in essentializing multitudinous peoples inside and outside of the continent. African immigrants "at times recognize a positive and sustaining pan-African sense" but they can also "encounter starkly stigmatizing negative perceptions in other contexts," such as in schools (Kiramba et al., 2023, p. 3).

For this reason, it is essential to move beyond the homogenous descriptor of Black to one that considers African identities, as this adds much-needed analytical power to how Blackness is understood and experienced in its diversity. While the marker "Black" recognizes the heterogeneous and socio-politically constructed grouping of peoples that derive from many parts of the world, and it encompasses many ethnocultural and linguistic groups. In practice, such diversity is not readily recognized for the knowledge and epistemologies it carries. Therefore, the "*desirability* of disambiguating demographic data to a more granular degree" especially where the data involves the educational context and its future impact on integration, is essential, because the experiences of the young people like those who participated in this study and their conflation with the larger discourse on Black creates more difficulties by way of rendering them invisible (Kiramba, et al., 2023, p.3; Dei et al., 2022). The findings of this study joins the chorus of other scholars who have called on teachers and social workers in educational and clinical settings to deepen their cultural knowledge and competency beyond the limited and often recounted aspects of Black and African histories that reify whiteness and Eurocentric superiority to one that illustrates the breadth of African history and its diversity across continents, countries, peoples, and ethnicities (Dei et al., 2022; Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018). Doing so allows educators and social workers in learning or clinical contexts to "move beyond seeing their African immigrant students from a deficit lens to understanding their intellects and the rich frames of cultural and linguistic reference they bring to the classroom, which can enrich learning for all if properly exploited" (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018, pp. 77–78).

For participants, their network of friends (at school) and ties with their families and ethnic communities were instrumental in weathering the oppressive and demoralizing experiences and developing strategies for achieving their imagined future ambitions. Part of improving their outcome was to discuss with their peers (school and ethnic community) the process of racial socialization. In the absence of culturally sustaining pedagogies that provide a curriculum that is not stereotyping or limited in depth and breadth, participants began to develop their capacity to counter such narratives by co-creating opportunities that allowed them to affirm themselves. This included learning more about their own histories and that of their ethnically diverse peers to re-educate themselves about past and current contributions of peoples like them and others in the world.

Furthermore, being immersed at home in their heritage and its ensuing cultural and linguistic practices also acted as a protective mechanism against societal experiences that mirrored a less welcoming and more stereotypical view and expectation of them. In addition, relationships formed with peers in their ethnic community were instrumental for participants. These relationships allowed them to have discussions with others like them without having the added burden of setting a cultural context. Rather, being raised in an Ethiopian household with all of its heterogeneous expressions still acted as a shared foundation from which they could have more nuanced discussions about what it means to be Ethiopian, of African descent, male, children of immigrants, born in Canada, and in school to forge a healthy future. Indeed, the literature is clear that racial socialization speaks to familial and community practices "which prepare Black children to navigate discrimination and racism as well as enhance their knowledge of Black history and culture" (Wint et al., 2022, p. 191; see also Dei et al., 2022). The participants tapped into this phenomenon to safeguard their well-being and recapture and reclaim "the history and collective legacy of brilliance and skill" of their heritage in their Canadian context (Wint et al., 2022, p. 191; see also Dei et al., 2022).

Findings from this study highlight that the relationships with society, neighbourhoods, schools, and families that Black males of African descent are developing are critical factors for their educational success, which invariably informs their ability to realize their future ambitions. Naturally, it will be critical to restructure such environments to cultivate more equitable opportunities and foster confidence to equip them "to make agentic decisions towards achieving their academic potential" (Wint et al., 2022, p. 191). In this study, the support systems that participants identified as playing a crucial role were their ethnic community and peers, their families, and their racialized friends from school. However, capacity-building mechanisms must be expanded to include educators (i.e., teachers and social workers/counsellors) for the learners to be fully supported. Therefore, as Black males of African descent continue to experience the challenges and obstacles they may encounter in their pursuit of an education, qualified teachers and critically trained social workers/counsellors in educational contexts are required to support their development in a manner that instills a culturally proficient curriculum whereby social workers/counsellors and educators have "high student expectations, provide rigorous academic

challenges, and develop individual and culturally relevant approaches to learning" (Wint et al., 2022, p. 192). These goals can be realized with educators and social workers in school settings working together to cultivate an authentic and trusting relationship through positive engagement with these students. Positive engagement will create space for a more integrated and holistic mentoring relationship that will likely yield educational success and build social capital. This has the strong capacity to provide Black males of African descent with the real opportunity to have confidence in the benefits and rewards of an educational system that is investing in them, and this investment will shape their positive integration into Canadian society (Carey, 2020; Kiramba et al., 2023; Nelson, 2016; Wint et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This article examines the obstacles encountered by second-generation Ethiopian males during their time in school, the support they needed, their experiences with race and racialization, and how they built on their abilities and skills to enable them to realize their future ambitions. Although our findings are consistent with other research that has examined the obstacles faced by Black males in the educational system, they also align with emerging research in African immigrant youth/second-generation African youth experiences with cross-cultural obstacles that reflect stereotyping and marginalization based on racial, cultural, and ethnic identities. Our findings also reflect the resiliency Black African male students bring forward in their struggle to overcome this stigmatization and achieve academic success. These findings have implications for how social workers/counsellors in educational and clinical contexts can better advocate for a more expansive curriculum and support Black African male students in their pursuit of educational success as they navigate the educational terrain. Given the increasing prominence of Ethiopian and other African communities in Canada, future research that draws from a larger sample and employs a life-course intersectional perspective to explore the strategies these youth develop to achieve academic success and a healthier integration into Canadian society is encouraged.

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