CHALLENGES FACED BY MALE AFRICAN IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN ACCESSING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

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Abstract

The presentation is on a participatory research study aiming at better understanding the role played by acculturation, cultural capital and masculinity in first generation male African immigrant youth's efforts to access post-secondary education. Our research team recently completed phase 1 of the study, which consisted of interviews and focus groups with 40 young men who immigrated to Canada from Africa as dependents of economic immigrants or refugees. The young men graduated from high school in Southern Ontario in Canada and have continued on through postsecondary education. Our presentation will highlight findings from phase 1 of our study. Although we asked primarily about their postsecondary education decisions, the young men revealed general themes on their gradual adjustment to life in Canada giving us a good idea of their evolving relationships with parents, school authorities and peers in home, school, and in neighbourhood contexts. More specifically, they discussed the theme of belonging, and the meaning of being young Black men in a society where in their words: "a standard exists for people who are Black and that standard is not very high." African immigrant and refugee male youth face challenges in various aspects of their educational lives, but as this study reveals, these young men still find ways of navigating these challenges to achieve their educational goals. While certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others and can help or hinder one's social mobility, for some African students they incorporated their ethnic cultural capital into this valued cultural capital. The ethnic cultural capital of immigrants forms a crucial part of the integration process and should help inform how school curriculum, programs and policies, and classroom dynamics should be created to serve or support visible minority students in Canadian schools. The participants in this study indicated how their culture shapes their attitudes, especially in schools. However, they expressed how difficult it is for them to navigate the cultural capital they have in the midst of the strong stereotypes that have already been created about black male youth in Canadian schools and society.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, High School Education, Male African Immigrant Youth, Postsecondary Education.

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