Transferring While Black

Intersectional Experiences of Black College-to-University Transfer Students in Canada

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Abstract

In the Canadian province of Ontario, higher education institutions have amplified their efforts to advance social equity and inclusion by establishing transfer programmes between colleges and universities. However, transitioning between these institutions continues to present challenges for the policy objectives assumed in transfer programmes. Few studies have analysed how students from historically marginalised backgrounds experience the transfer process, and how these experiences present a challenge for the ability of transfer pathways to function as a mechanism of equity and inclusion. Our study sheds light on the experiences of an important section of this population: Black college-to-university transfer students. Underpinned by the theory of intersectionality, our study critically explores the challenges that Black transfer students encounter in their transferring and settling into Canadian universities. Utilising in-depth interviews, our exploratory qualitative analysis shows that Black transfer students face a

host of challenges linked to their race, class, and gender. These experiences impact students' ability to transfer smoothly into their new school and pursue their academic goals in a timely fashion. Major issues include, but not limited to, the racism of low expectations, lack of representation within the transfer ecosystem, lack of support that considers the diversity within Black transfer students, and information asymmetry. Although we focus on the narratives of Black transfer students in the Canadian academy, this research advances the cause of equity by helping the higher education communities worldwide to reflect on how educational pathways can help higher education become a meaningful corrective of social disadvantage.

Introduction

It is never easy to describe what it means to be a racialised person in the western academy, a place that wraps itself in the virtues of humanism, which categorically rejects the suppression of human nature and human interests in favour of narrow interpretations of the world. Against such a backdrop, articulating individual and collective grievances becomes particularly difficult. This is because voicing such grievances causes sometimes a backlash that expresses itself in a spectrum of reactions. These are charges that sometimes take the form of diminishing the importance of the issues being raised and other times pathologizing those who raise those issues by casting their concerns as 'inability' to grasp the climate of opportunity and tolerance at hand. The political and cultural intricacies inherent to an organisational environment of this kind makes even the most genuine voices vulnerable to incredulity and/or patronising dismissal.

This dynamic underlies some of the challenges faced by Black academics and students who attempt to have their voices heard in the Canadian academy, a place that is not particularly noted in the international domain for anti-Black racism or other -isms that run counter to the principles of humanistic education. Part of the challenge arises from the fact that the collective imaginary in Canada is so conditioned to the Canadian academy being nice, civil, and non-Black. This attitude, in turn, makes it harder for Black Canada to make its stories and histories visible in "a place where the dominant national narratives tend to imagine it as belonging elsewhere" (Ibrahim et al. 2022:1).

Within a context framed by this ascribed deficit identity, many Black academics and scholars (e.g., Daniel, 2019; Dryden, 2022; Smith, 2022; Wright, 2022) have started to articulate their experiences of Blackness across the Canadian academy. The outcome of this collective endeavour was a cornucopia of narratives that celebrates their achievements, documents the status quo, and problematises the experiences that many are unwilling to accept the fact that they exist, mar the campus experience for many African Canadians, and, thus, weaken the ability of higher education to function as a meaningful corrective of social disadvantage.

Notwithstanding past experiences related to anti-Blackness, there is an opportunity for positive change. Sadly, the catalyst for the opportunity we see has been the growing violence against Black people as evidenced by the recent racist mass shooting in Buffalo, which claimed the lives of 10 people and injured three others. This incident raised public conscience in the United States and Canada to the dangerous implications of anti-Black racism. Higher education institutions are well-positioned to lead and accelerate the change. Colleges and universities are the chief mechanism of knowledge production and dissemination in any society, and by virtue of this unique position, these institutions are indeed anchors of change and growth within their communities (Adam, 2021). Therefore, unless these institutions exercise leadership in addressing the systemic barriers confronting racialised students and academics, policies and public statements on the social malaises of racism, inequality, and poverty will only ring hollow. The purpose of this article is to help Canadian academic institutions to assume this leadership role by texturing existing narratives by college-to-university Black transfer students who are often on the margins of student transfer discourse. Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2017) concept of intersectionality, the analysis in this project suggests that Black transfer students face subtle forms of discrimination that are compounded at the interactions of Blackness, gender, age, class, and ability. While our research focuses on the experiences of Black students in Canada's postsecondary education, institutional leaders, higher education scholars as well as students from historically disadvantaged groups in other jurisdictions may find the analysis pertinent.

The paper is organised as follows: the next section highlights the literature review on educational pathways in Ontario's postsecondary education and the existing gaps in knowledge. In the third part, we contextualise our research to situate its contribution relative to other work in the filed. In the fourth part,

we outline the research method. In the final section, we report our findings, offering in the process critical commentary on each point.

Literature review

American education research has repeatedly touted the importance of improving the college-to-university transfer function for the social and economic mobility of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Chase, Dowd, Pazich and Bensimon, 2012; Crisp and Nuñez, 2014; Harper, Patton and Wooden, 2009). What is often regarded as an issue of outcome equity is believed to acquire more importance on the policy agenda of national authorities of higher education. One reason why educational pathways are gaining importance is demographics. Minorities are projected to represent half of resident U.S. population by 2050 (Jackson, 2013). Hence, successful vertical transfer for students of colour has implications that go beyond the contours of racial equity to include implications that arise from economic considerations such as whether a significant source of future labour force have the skillset and knowledge necessary to sustain the country's global competitiveness.

We posit that many of the aforementioned considerations hold true for Ontario, which provided the political impulse for the proliferation of college-to-university pathways and other credit articulation agreements. Currently, over 55,000 students transfer between postsecondary institutions in Ontario annually (Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer Annual Report [ONCAT] 2017:18). This includes college-to-college, university-to-college, and college-to-university transfers. While there are numerous studies on each of the above ways of transfer, the review that follows focuses on literature on college-to-university transfers in the Canadian context. In literature on transfers in the province of Ontario (Bell, 1998; Decock and Janzen, 2016; Decock et al, 2011; Kerr et al. 2010; Martinello and Stewart, 2015; Morrin, 2011), researchers have tended to examine student transfers from colleges to universities of a handful of institutions. Little is known about transfers happening from colleges to many universities in the province. This is surprising given that many institutions in Ontario have thriving transfer programmes for students coming from other universities as well as from colleges of applied arts and technology. This research contributes to filling this void in knowledge. In addition, this project

focuses specifically on the experiences of Black college-to-university students at Canadian universities who have been largely overlooked in the literature.

Existing scholarship on college-to-university transfer students has covered a range of topics. Recurring themes in research on transfers include transfer credit policies (Khaja, 2013), the transfer credit system (Constantineau, 2009; Munro, 2005), transfer pathways of students (Arnold, 2011; Lang and Lopes, 2014; McCloy and Henderson, 2017; Smith et al. 2016) and experiences of college-to-university transfer students (Andres, 2001; Andres et al. 1997; Cameron, 2005; Gerhardt and Ackerman, 2014; McCloy and Henderson, 2017; Usher and Jarvey, 2012). Researchers investigating experiences of transfer students have looked at the academic performance of college-to-university transfer students (Bell, 1998; Drewes et al. 2012). Some researchers have compared the learning approaches and performance of transfer students with students admitted directly from high schools (Acai & Newton, 2015). There is no consensus in the findings in terms of the success and performance of transfer students (Martinello and Stewart, 2015; ONCAT 2013; Shook et al. 2016). Many of the studies on students' experiences are qualitative, with focus groups and in-depth interviews being commonly used research methods.

Interestingly, literature on the experiences of transfer students tends to mostly mention the age and gender as demographic profiles of transfer students (Acai and Newton, 2015; Decock and Janzen, 2016; Gerhardt and Ackerman, 2014; Shook et al. 2016). With exceptions like the 2019 ONCAT funded project on experiences of Black university-to-college transfer students (ONCAT 2018-19), not much research has focused in any detailed manner on students' experiences of transfer specifically linked to their race and other intersecting identities. This is a huge oversight given the ways race, particularly that of Black students, informs how they experience postsecondary institutions in Canada. Many Black students – not necessarily transfer students – have narrated the racial aggressions they contend with in colleges and universities across the country (Martis, 2020; Price, 2020; Wong, 2020). For many Black people, racism is not aberrant or unusual, rather, it is something that is ordinary, endemic, and intricately intertwined and embedded in the fabric of society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Given that there are few Black students in Canadian universities and Black youth in the country are unlikely to "have attended a higher educational institution and to have earned a postsecondary diploma" (Houle, 2020:5), it is important to prioritise research on how race and other intersecting identities impact student transfers and

settlement at their new institutions. It is increasingly evident that while access to postsecondary education matters, racial equity is not merely to put people through school. This is why understanding experiences of Black transfer students matters, which is the topic of our research. Thus, our research has the potential to improve both enrolment and graduation rates of Black youth in Canadian universities, and the benefit of these academic achievements for students' ability to transition to a successful future. After all, the attainment of postsecondary qualifications is found to yield important benefits in terms of the labor market outcomes, including more stable employment and higher earnings (Bank of Canada 2018; Turcotte, 2020).

Looking at mainstream conversations about student transfer, it is interesting to examine whose voices and experiences have been privileged. Similar to observations by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), experiences of White, middle class, heterosexual, cismale students without disabilities have been largely normalised. This research textures existing narratives by drawing on voices of Black transfer students that are often on the margins of student transfer discourse. In doing so, our study aligns in important ways with critical race theorists whose work is quintessentially aimed at "disrupt[ing] dominant stories and perspectives of White hegemony and White privilege in the academy by providing counter-narratives or counter-stories from non-dominant social locations" (Abawi, 2018:86). In view of the above discussion, the overarching goal of our research is to understand more comprehensively Black college-to-university transfer students' experiences that intersect with their race and other identities. Through this study, we contribute to the literature on how universities can foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment for minoritised students who transition from colleges.

Contextual Background And Significance

In the Canadian province of Ontario, the introduction of transfer pathways between colleges and universities came as a reform policy. The objective pursued is this policy was, among other things, to expand access to university education by providing opportunities for otherwise excluded students to acquire higher-level qualifications and meet demands for higher-level skills in the labour market (Skolnik et al. 2018). The idea is by no means new. In fact, since the inception of the college sector in the late 1960s, the idea of alternative trajectories to undergraduate education loomed large, igniting

lively debates within the higher education community in Ontario (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986). Particular concerns were raised by students, scholars, academic institutions, and policymakers regarding the lack of many links between colleges and universities. In a binary higher education system like Ontario's, tenuous links between the two sectors may have only reinforced hierarchies, as students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds tended to cluster around colleges, thereby creating an informal hierarchy of status (Adam, 2017; Clark et al. 2009). Reform efforts in educational pathways culminated in the creation of the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) in 2011. ONCAT was mandated to improve student mobility by facilitating the development of learning pathways among Ontario's publicly funded colleges and universities to optimise postsecondary options for students looking to transfer among institutions (Trick, 2013).

Today, postsecondary education pathways are less linear. Fewer students are entering postsecondary education programmes directly from high school, benefiting from the various bilateral and multilateral credit transfer agreements supported by ONCAT (Davies and Pizarro Milian, 2020). However, while mobility after graduation within the same sector is becoming less problematic, transfer occurring between sectors, as in the case of the study discussed in this paper, continues to generate policy challenges. The research in this article draws attention to this critically important dimension by providing a specific take on the lived realities of Black students transitioning from a college to university, their social and academic adjustments. This is an important area that is yet to be thoroughly investigated, given the social, psychological, and financial challenges associated with transferring and settling into a new school, and the impact thereof on the experiences and success of transfer students. This said, the research shifts focus to micro factors of accessibility that received scant attention in previous research, which tends to focus on either macro factors such as policy shortcomings, or to technicalities such as credit recognition and duplication of coursework. By studying Black transfer students, this research advances the cause of equity by helping policymakers to identify how pathways improve access for underrepresented students. It also helps universities to build capacity by identifying where additional support is needed to offer a quality education to all qualified students seeking university education.

Intersectionality

In examining experiences of Black college-to-university transfer students, this research took an intersectional approach, something largely missing in existing literature on student transfer in Canada. An intersectional approach acknowledges the multiple barriers, systemic discriminations, and different forms of prejudice and sometimes privileges depending on the period and situation (Runyan 2018). Viewed through this prism, students may experience multiple barriers at the intersections of their race, class, national origin, accents, ability and so on in addition to their age and gender in transferring and settling into new postsecondary institutions. Critical legal/race theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw—largely redited for coining the term 'intersectionality'—elaborates that: "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects." Crenshaw continues: "It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things" (Columbia Law School, 2017).

   While the initial work by Kimberlé Crenshaw focused on Black heterosexual migrant women, the concept is now utilised to examine how everyone holds "multiple, albeit constructed and provisional, identities" (Runyan, 2018). Runyan elaborates:

> The salience of such identities— based not only on race, normative gender, class, and nation but also on sexuality, nonnormative gender, physical (dis)ability, religion, and age—varies in different times and contexts, conferring either disadvantages or privileges on each of us, again in relation to time and context. This recognition has gone a long way toward disrupting hierarchies of oppression based, for example, on claims that class oppression trumps all other forms of oppression or that gender oppression is the [primary] oppression or that racial oppression must be primary to the exclusion of others. In this way, intersectional thinking has also opened the way to more inclusive and coalitional social movements and agendas.

Although the few studies conducted in the US foregrounding the concept of intersectionality in examining experiences of racialised transfer students (Castro and Cortez, 2017; Lui 2013) discuss how students' race intersects with categories like age and class to inform their realities, this project takes a different approach. This project moves away from conceptualising

oppression as occurring in hierarchies. In that regard, "multiple dimensions of identity" were considered "without necessarily prioritizing any one identity over another" because "intersectionality neither quantifies, compares, nor hierarchises identities and oppressions" (Myers, 2019:19). On the front end, the identity categories that intersect or interlock with race were not predetermined. As Busse, Krausch and Liao (2021:32) argue: "we live in complex social relationships where there is rarely any reality of homogenous groups of 'marginalised people' who are in institutions led exclusively by 'dominant people'." Given the heterogeneity in the group of Black college-to-university transfer students, averting specificity and precision in the abovementioned ways avoids inadvertently privileging certain types of subjugation while simultaneously silencing or marginalizing others. Further, it allows and opens the possibility for researchers to listen for and hear about different kinds of inequalities and privileges that they could not have predicted. Runyan (2018) contends that those who are "informed by intersectionality remain flexible and forward-looking, continuing to listen for and to the voicing of new or previously hidden inequities not addressed […] In this way, intersectional theory and practice is 'a work in progress' […]."

Methods, Data, And Analysis

In this project, the research question was as follows: What are the experiences of some Black college-to-university students in Canada? Implicit in this is a focus on Black transfers' experiences linked to their intersecting identities or race, class, gender, age, ability during the transfer and settling processes. The site of this research is the main campus of a major Canadian university. The methods for exploring the topic included a combination of individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview with Black students who transferred from different colleges to the university under study. Noteworthy, in abidance with the agreement we have reached with the Research Ethics Board in the case university, the names of the institutions involved in this study will be anonymised throughout the text. Hence, terms such as 'the case university' or the university under study' will be used to refer to the site of the study. By the same token, colleges from which students transferred will only be referenced as 'colleges'. We used purposive sampling (Bloor and Wood, 2006), because we sought specific information from a particular target sample. Following the research ethics guidelines, participating students were

contacted through offices of the Register in order to minimise pressure to participate. Additionally, to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will henceforth be used to refer to interviewees.

Due COVID-19 restriction, we used Zoom video conferencing to interview the participating students. Two interviewing strategies were employed. The first was individual interviews, which took place between October 2021 and March 2022. We conducted eleven, one-to-one interviews at a major Canadian research university to a roughly equal share of female and male Black transfer students. Interviews consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions that asked students about several issues, including their expectations of the transfer process. Interviews were also aimed at discerning perceptions, challenges, barriers, and support, with a focus on how these aspects intersect with participating students' identities of race, class, gender, age, and ability.

The second was a focus group interview. Some students preferred to participate only in focus group interviews, which gave us an opportunity to accommodate more students. It is generally thought that this form of interviews is ideal for 4-12 participants (Greenbaum, 1998; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). One focus group interview of up to two hours was conducted with six students in April 2022. This interview sought mainly to afford an opportunity to be more inclusive of Black voices. But focus group interviews have other important epistemological grounds: they help obtain narratives that, in turn, enable researchers to qualify data collected and clarify and extend findings (Krueger, Casey and Casey, 2009; O.Nyumba et al., 2018). This said, our focus group interview offered an opportunity to triangulate analysis, allowing us to generate collective responses to help establish themes, patterns, and differences in participating accounts. Discussing racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression can be sensitive and triggering. Interviews provided the environment necessary to explore and expand upon open-ended questioning. Our understanding of the participants' experiences deepened based on their responses and our interaction during the interview sessions. To avoid repetition, the accounts of only seven students are reported in findings. The research team saw that these accounts are the most reflective of how Black transfer students' experiences.

Analysis of interview data drew on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2020) first- second-cycle method of thematic analysis. The transcripts were initially read several times to familiarise ourselves with the data. Preliminary notes

and categories were made during these early iterations of familiarisation. This was followed by thematic analysis based on the intersectionality framework employed in this study. To enhance the trustworthiness of conclusions, two sets of themes were created by the research team and then compared and discussed to ensure inter-rater reliability (Cheung and Tai, 2021). Discussions among the research team continued throughout this stage to sharpen the analysis of transcripts. This approach helped capture the subtleties in Black students' experiences encapsulated in themes that will be discussed in the next section.

Findings

In their transfer and settling journey, Black college-to-university transfer students grapple with an interlocking system of racialised, classed, and gendered assumptions, extraneous to academic ability. These assumptions intersect with institutional and interpersonal factors that situate Black transfers in complex marginal positions, thereby impacting their academic engagement and progression toward desired academic trajectories.

Racism Of Low Expectations

Participant narratives revealed that Black transfer students grappled with racialised notions of academic performance that construct Blackness as synonymous with low academic ability. This biased outlook expresses itself most clearly in the low expectations of Black students. Several students reported that non-Black faculty and staff in particular had lower educational expectations for Black students. Ironically, these experiences are not peculiar to their study in college or university. In fact, they extend further back to their study at high school. For example, Jane, the daughter of immigrant Black parents who had some postsecondary education in their home country, explained her interactions with teachers and counsellors from high school:

> I had spoken to teachers from high school and stuff and you know, I even had an English scholarship because I was very versed in English … I was very studious and everything, but I remember one professor did say to me you know, if you're not sure, cause university is more theory and more intense … You should go to college first. Because college will give you the more hands-on work and university will give you more theory.

 Jane believed that her teacher managed to lower her expectations, by making the idea of entering straight to university seem inconceivable: "It took that one person to give me that little, you know, voice in my head that said, oh, maybe you're not ready. And then I ended up going to college." When asked if she obtained the grades and coursework that would enable her to go to university. Jane's response was firmly 'yes'. Reflecting on her experience, Jane added: "I ended up going to college. I regret that now because I know that I definitely could have gone straight to university." A similar experience awaited Jane at college, which eroded her faith in receiving the right counsel. Desperate for information, Jane sought advice from acquaintances, friends, and her older brother who was in university at that time. With the information supplied from these sources, Jane became convinced to pursue a university degree, opting for the fast-track transfer pathway that enabled her to finish college in two years and enter university, where further drama awaited her.

 Jane recalls that the transfer process was stressful, which was exacerbated by health issues that forced her out of school for more than two years. Upon recovery, Jane decided immediately to resume her university study. Jane chose the honours programme that would improve her chances of pursuing a graduate degree, an academic achievement to which she always aspired.

 These efforts brought Jane in contact with an academic advisor that was assigned to her by the university to guide her through the process. Jane recalls that despite her excellent academic record, that advisor insisted that she might not be ready to join the honours programme:

> [I] was still trying to get my bearings as to which one which, which courses I should be in. Then she would tell me things like, well, this professor is very, very tough on her students. So, I don't know if you want to take her course … I remember I would come to her with courses that I would be interested in, and she would tell me things like, okay, this course is tough. And lots of students complain about how much work it is and how much of a load that they have.

The advisor suggested that it is better for Jane to take extra courses before considering the honours programme. Because Jane was transferring from college, she assumed that she had no other choices available to her, only to realise later that she was not given the full range of options. Upon completing the courses that advisor suggested, Jane went to see the same advisor who

was surprised to see Jane complete her courses faster than she anticipated and with excellent academic record:

> [W]hen she saw my grades for the courses that I had taken and she looked, she opened the computer and she went like that [shocked facial expression]. And I was like, is everything okay? And then she's like, oh no, you're doing really well. I was like, oh, I was even shocked cause I didn't know that, you know, I didn't think she was going to be that shocked. She's like, you're doing very well.

Jane's situation illustrates the multiple challenges faced by Black transfers. The first is susceptibility to undergo a 'cooling-out process', defined by Burton Clark (1980) as redirecting community college students who experience academic failure to move out of transfer degree programmes through counselling rather than discipline. To avoid oversimplification, which could lead to simplistic prescriptions for educational equity, one point should be made entirely clear about the cooling-out process. In its original formulation, the cooling-out process embraces a meritocratic definition of fairness by proceeding from the premise – and as Clark (1960) himself posits – that academic ability and record are the only determinants of which students will or will not be cooled out. According to this outlook, the cooling-out process is only fair when "factors extraneous to academic ability do not significantly predict which students are cooled out" (Hellmich, 1993:17). We do not subscribe to this narrow definition of fairness, as it defines success by terms that apply only to socially privileged students. Nonetheless, even if we assessed the experiences of Jane and other participating Black students against the meritocratic measures entailed by the cooling-out process, they by no means stand the test of fairness. Why? Simply because although Jane and the other Black transfers had deviated from the expectation of failure by performing well academically, they nonetheless faced racialised and classed assumptions that permeate the idea of Blackness and hinder Black advancement.

 Bourdieu (1986) explains the inherent unfairness of meritocratic measures of academic ability, which places a lot of emphasis on the cultural capital of the dominant group. In this light, students from racialised groups are more likely to be cooled out, as these students do not look, act, or speak like the majority group. Therefore, factors such as race, gender, class, and age are central to academic performance and who gets cooled out, which has been shown in previous research. In this respect, Rector (2017) shows that race, class, and

gender were significantly related to why Black students were in the cooling-out process. Hence, the cooling-out process like the one experienced by Jane denies (or at least aimed to deny) an equitable distribution of educational opportunity to disadvantaged students. Research has also shown how teachers' low expectations can abuse Black students of their high aspirations, thereby setting these students on the path of being cooled out, which, in turn, contributes to perpetuating socio-demographic gaps in educational attainment. According to Gershenson, Holt and Papageorge (2016), low expectations of some teachers could become self-fulfilling prophecies with students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are more vulnerable, especially those who lack access to role models who can counteract teachers' low expectations. The participating transfer students in this study are from immigrant families, or are themselves recent immigrant adult students, with no previous familiarity with the academic and organisational culture of Canadian colleges and universities. Therefore, as Jane's narrative illustrates, the availability of academic and support staff who can empathise with Black transfer students is an integral part of creating an inclusive transfer ecosystem within colleges and universities, which brings us to our next point.

Lack of Representation

Students also noted the continued underrepresentation of Black individuals in the transfer ecosystem, particularly in the university. Representation, or lack thereof, affects Black transfer students in multiple ways. For Elijah, an absence of Black role-models and mentors hinders the inclusion and academic performance of Black transfer students:

> I don't think there's any resources to support Black transfer students specifically … [name of university] still is predominantly a white school. Also, in terms of support specifically for Black students, I don't think there was really anything I sought out because I didn't really know the kind of support available … I think it was just a lack of those resources that are tailored for black students.

Rasheeda thought that the availability of support staff that reflects the demographics is one way to address the feeling of isolation that Black transfer experience on campus:

> I really fully believe that having black advisors would make a difference. Because I feel like black advisors would be more sensitive to a person of colour coming in and understanding that the reality might be different. And so they may have to, you know, let me not say certain things, let me not say and I'm not sure if this, this load would be for you. It's a lot of work. Yeah. Things like that.

Jamal concurred by highlighting the high potential of Black support staff and professors to establish rapport with like-minded students, which, in turn, could nurture a sense of belonging and community:

> I don't feel like I could have connected with a lot of my professors or, not just professors, but anyone that was offering support. So, like even when they talk about the counselors, I don't feel they would understand my experience because they wouldn't, once more, they work from… in my experience, they were from that colorblind perspective. So, I think that in itself caused me to just pull back in some areas because I'm just like, I don't know how beneficial this is for everyone.

These stories underscore the importance of Black representation as a motivational strategy. Universities, and colleges for that matter, have vested interests in creating an academic environment where students feel they belong. Although a full range is somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that students who develop a sense of belonging are more academically engaged, which is found to have also a positive effect on motivation, retention, cognitive growth, and the cultivation of communicative and cross-cultural skills (Appleton et al. 2008; Gurin and UA 2002). Some participants suggested that their university should be more intentional about the issue of representation, citing how this structural factor intersects with societal factors as racialised, classed, gendered ideas and impact their persistence and learning.

The Intersectionality of Female Blackness and Transfer

Female Black transfer students face a combination of challenges that make transitioning and settling into university more challenging. Diane, an engineering student from a solidly middle-class background, remembers her experience in a White-male dominated environment:

> I feel like whenever I'm in a group project, I'm always delegated to the administrative side, like, okay, you can send the emails or you can take notes at the meeting or whatever, rather than being a part of the conversation.

Diane described her experience as anxiety-provoking, because she felt constantly required to prove herself as capable of handling her academic work independently. The absence of many Black students in Diane's department was another factor that contributed to her developing feelings of isolation and loneliness that impacts her perceptions of belonging:

> I don't feel well represented though. The engineering department, because there aren't a lot of black engineering students or materials that I can relate to.

Diane apparently faces a combination of sexism and racial biases that conflate race with class. This remark concurs with Anderson (2022) which observes that race, gender, and class impacts the ways that Black women experience interactions with White men in particular who tend to conflate race and class. Thus, middle-class Black women continue to encounter racialised and gendered images connected to class as Black people have been traditionally viewed as hailing from low-income and working-class backgrounds.

Some Black college-to-university transfer students encounter a daunting array of challenges. A case in point is Iman, a single first-generation immigrant from a Sub-Saharan African country. After slogging through menial jobs for several years, she decided to pursue the path of academia, assuming that higher education would be her gateway into a better life in Canada. Iman holds a bachelor's degree from her home country. She also holds what distinguishes all great learners: a passion for learning and knowledge:

> I have this incredible yearning to learn, to just know things, learn more things. Have a better understanding of things. And I have the ability to do it.

Quickly after enrolling in a college, Iman decided to use the credits she earned at college toward a university degree. When we asked her when and why she decided to transfer to university, she replied:

> The moment I enrolled in college. It was automatic …I didn't know the avenues to get into a university.

This narrative illustrates the first challenge that students like Iman have to struggle with: access to information.

Like most transfer students in this study, obtaining the right information in a large institution as the university under study is not easy. Sometimes, there is a large volume of information, which strikes transfer students as rather overwhelming. Noteworthy, this challenge is not specific to Iman, but for African immigrants navigating unfamiliar school systems, it is an important one. One way how information accessibility plays out for Iman is that it impacts ability to enjoy positive school involvement, which also impacts her ability to get the support that matters to her as a member of the LGBTQ community. Iman finds it difficult to locate the support she needs to complete her academic journey:

> I tend to see the world differently. Coming from where I am from with all intersections accounted for. Because I identify as non-binary and of course I'm apply to the LGBT2Q+ community. But I haven't even reached out because I've been hyper focused on just getting what needs to be done, done in terms of school work … So the amount of time that I spent like navigating these. Click on one link, takes you somewhere else and you know, the amount of time.

Hence, Iman tends to draw conjectural inferences about the organisational culture of her university and where to go in order to find support she needs to cope with health and economic challenges she continues to experience. This is quite similar to the experience of Jenna, who is also a first-generation African immigrant. Jenna believed that her biggest challenges she faced was finding support geared toward transfer students from Africa, not only African Canadians:

> African Society at [name of university] it's not super filled up with actual Africans. It has black Canadians, but no one who identified as African. It's kind of frustrating that I'm constantly having to explain to people, things that they should try to be more aware of. Whereas they might reference something here and I'm expected to know about it. … So, that's one of my biggest frustrations that people don't go out of their way to know about other things. Whereas transfers were expected to know all these things be caught up to date and all of that.

When asked if they would reach out for assistance from their institution, both Iman and Jenna felt uneasy about reaching out. Both exhibited a sense

of unease regarding 'opening up' about their concerns. Such an attitude is probably attributable to what empirical work observed about African immigrant students who tend to be less willing to use their schools' health and social well-being related services (Nyika, 2022; Stolp, Wilkin and Raine, 2015). The underlying reason, these studies indicate, is that students perceive these locations as 'not for them' due to poor representation of the Black people in the broader daily environments. A lack of meaningful response by universities for biased representations of Blackness would probably mean that many Black voices on campus remain silent.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here provides a clear picture that race, class, and gender influence the transfer experience that Black transfer students undergo at both college and university. Black transfer students encounter racialised notions compounded by factors, such as low expectations, which equates Blackness with low ability. Although transfer students represent academic success stories, they are often faced with racial biases in the transfer ecosystem that seek to dissuade them from aspiring high. These forms of discrimination sometimes take on distinct gendered forms when Black female students in a White-dominated field of study are viewed as inferior academically and thus assigned less challenging work. Lack of representation is another factor that resonated with the experiences of most participating students, exacerbating their sense of isolation. Moreover, the lack of support that considers the diversity within Black transfer students creates classed, raced, and gendered experiences for Black transfers. A subgroup of participants is first-generation immigrants with some postsecondary education in their home countries and thus need support that enables them to navigate an unfamiliar academic culture.

In general, our findings support the assumptions of Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2017) theory of intersectionality, which suggests that discrimination occurs at the intersection of race, gender, age, class, and ability. Our findings stress the need for properly directed support that considers how this intersectionality hinders or accelerates the academic success of Black transfer students. Considering the above-mentioned discussions, we hope that our findings bring forth ways that not only make the transfer process seamless, but also contributes to the larger policy debate on how universities can create an

inclusive environment for students from historically disadvantaged groups. Put differently, we hope that our research will help the Canadian academy to take a step forward along the path of humanism it reveres.

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