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# The Experiences of Racialized Faculty within Independent Schools: A Narrative Inquiry

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**The Experiences of Racialized Faculty within Independent Schools: A Narrative Inquiry**

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

In this research, I explored the lived experiences of racialized faculty within Canadian independent schools. The genesis of this study was the profound lack of information available about the experiences of racialized peoples within the independent school context. This poses significant issues for me, both professionally and personally. Without any insight into or understanding of the lived experiences of racialized communities within the contexts of independent schools, there is little hope for making meaningful changes towards more equitable and inclusive educational experiences for these groups. This study is important, if we as Canadians, believe that the ideals of equity should be extended to all demographics who attend and teach within independent schools. The overarching research question used to guide my inquiry was: How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within independent schools contributed to the understanding of race? Using Narrative Inquiry as a methodological framework, I positioned each narrative within the context of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and then analyzed through an integrative theoretical framework which draws on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) as a decolonial practice. Using a CSP approach would foreground alternative cultural epistemologies to meet the pedagogical needs of racialized students and faculty within the independent school system. The findings from this study support the recommendation that independent schools be open to pausing, acknowledging the harm that has been caused, and to listen and learn from racialized communities in the process towards decolonization. In undertaking this process, this study hopes that independent schools can work towards a stronger relational ethic with the racialized faculty and students that live and learn within their school systems.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Panjwani. The interviews conducted and reported in Chapters 4-5 were covered by Ethics Certificate number REB21-1554, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the project “The Experiences of Racialized Faculty within Independent Schools: A Narrative Inquiry” on March 15th, 2023.

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To the participants who I have had the pleasure and honour to live and learn alongside. Thank you for trusting me with your story. I hope I have released them into the world in a good way.

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source of inspiration for me. I am grateful for the opportunity to grow alongside you in this lifetime.

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Lastly, to the creator, thank you for the opportunities and gifts you have entrusted me with. I bow my head in humble service to you.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The desire to understand the experiences of racialized peoples in independent school contexts drives this research study. The aim of this study is to centre the voices that have, often, been relegated to the sidelines in the independent schooling system in Canada. Furthermore, through this study, I aim to shed light on the often tenuous and nuanced relationship that racialized professionals have had within education. Through a narrative inquiry methodology and the use of semi-structured interviews, I have listened, lived alongside, and learned about the stories of three racialized faculty who have navigated their way through the independent school system in their professional lives. Each story has been positioned within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework to account for place, time, and the personal and social factors influencing each interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Using a pragmatic worldview, I have analyzed and interpreted each narrative individually, on their own merit, before examining the stories from a macrosocial perspective. Using an integrative theoretical framework which draws from Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2019) as a decolonial practice, I have analyzed the collected stories through sociological themes of power, privilege, oppression, and assimilation to gain a deeper understanding of the greater narrative of race relations as it is experienced and lived within independent schools across Canada.

In the context of a political climate charged by events such as the George Floyd murder, Anti-Asian violence across North America, and the Idle No More Movement, it is my hope that these stories will serve to amplify the voices and the lived experiences of racialized peoples at a time when it is most needed. The sharing of these stories is intended to inspire dialogue within the independent school system, which can contribute to material change within educational institutions that are keen on discussing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **Positioning of the Researcher**

I position myself in this study as an educator within an independent school in Alberta, a member of the South Asian and Muslim communities of Calgary, and a novice researcher within a doctoral program. It is within the intersections of these roles that I come to this research seeking to learn more about the experiences of those with similar professional backgrounds as mine.

As an immigrant from India, raised in Canada amongst predominantly White communities, I have had a complex relationship both with this land and my own culture. Although my birthplace is a formerly colonized country, I am complicit in the historical and ongoing dispossession of the First Peoples of this land from their traditional ways of life. In recounting memories from my childhood, I recognize the various experiences that have contributed to my internalized racism. Like many racialized people, I, too, have struggled to navigate themes of assimilation, acceptance, and internalized racism throughout my childhood and into adulthood. As a child visiting my beloved motherland, my relatives would admonishingly make comments regarding the darkness of my skin. In high school, my mother would often berate me for dressing “too Black” but would celebrate the adornment of Eurocentric garb. As an adult, I have used my White girlfriends as a badge of honor to prove my acceptance into the dominant culture. For many years, I did not question these things, for they did not seem problematic. Upon deeper reflection, I have spent a lifetime chasing markers of Whiteness in my personal and professional life.

As a racialized educator currently working in an independent school, I am now reflecting on why I have chosen to work in predominantly white institutions for the majority of my 12 year career. I am beginning to explore and understand the interrelationships between colonization,

structural inequality, and my internalized racism. Although I have also taught for four years within public institutions, I have always placed independent education on a pedestal. The market logics of status driven competition espoused within these independent schools, which I associated with excellence and success, drove me to seek employment in these spaces. I am only now learning how the very same values rooted in colonial logics have been used to marginalize and oppress communities of racialized peoples.

Repeatedly, I have found myself moving away from the South Asian parts of my identity in hopes of seeking validation and acceptance from the dominant culture. This dissertation is the epistemological and ideological reset that I have needed to unlearn the ways in which I have accepted my place in the socially constructed racial hierarchy. I am acknowledging the difficult truth that the starting place for anti-racism work must be to change oneself. I am acknowledging the deep and profound violence that my spirit has been subjected to because of colonization. Through the writing of this dissertation, I am reclaiming my voice by rejecting the systems of colonial thought that I have internalized because of historical and ongoing colonization.

It is important to also note that I identify with a pragmatist worldview and am reluctant to subscribe to any one ideology. Using a pragmatic framework allows me to pull from a variety of methodological tools to answer my research questions. In particular, I am drawn to philosophies espoused by John Dewey (1916), in which the practice of education and the living of life are inextricably bound. Deweyan pragmatic philosophies and his notions of experience are baked into the methodology of narrative inquiry and have had a profound impact on me as a researcher.

As such, I also come to this research as a storyteller that is hoping to illuminate the narratives of the lives of people who have had similar professional teaching experiences within independent schools, in hopes to better understand the unfolding of my own life's experiences. I

have drawn from those with teaching, coaching, and administrative experience within independent schools. Furthermore, I am hoping that this research informs the reader in a way that enriches your understanding and relationships with Indigenous and racialized peoples.

Lastly, I recognize I am, simultaneously, an insider and an outsider within my own research as I share similar experiences with the participants within our professional contexts (Bolak, 1997). As a racialized educator working within independent schools, I have lived experience of the phenomena being studied. This positionality has allowed me to form deeper insights into the connection between race, colonization, and equity within independent schools. It has also allowed me to form connections from my own lived experiences around themes such as the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy in schools, being forced to assimilate to the dominant culture, and acts of discrimination as violence and harm caused to me. I have felt the pain that colonial systems have inflicted on racialized people, and this is what has drawn me to this inquiry.

### **Independent Schools**

While much has been said about educational systems that are underfunded and without resources, very few scholars have closely studied the educational systems that operate in conditions of abundance, opportunity, and success as defining characteristics. Researching independent schools can provide insights into the social and cultural dynamics that shape inequality across the education system (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). According to Pelt (2017) of the Fraser Institute, Canada has approximately 2,000 independent schools enrolling over 360,000 students across the country. Historically, these schools have served the purpose of offering faith-based and single-sex alternatives to the public schooling system (Maxwell & Maxwell, 1994). However, with an evolution of civil society towards a more secular and co-ed

model of education, most of these schools have followed suit. Likewise, as the cultural and racial demographics of the country have changed, so has the clientele of independent schools been modified. While it is documented that up to 30 percent of the demographic at schools such as Upper Canada College, an elite independent school in Toronto, were racialized minorities in the early 2000s (Maxwell & Maxwell, 2006); currently, little is known about how these demographic numbers may have changed in recent times. Furthermore, very little has been documented about the racial and ethnic demographics of the professional faculty within independent schools across Canada. Independent schools are sites where privileges are compounded, and social class is reproduced. Robinson and Garnier (1985) summarized that:

through the choice of curriculum, pedagogical methods, the relationship between teacher and students, and the methods of selection—all of which gave the children of the economically privileged and well educated an advantage over the children of the less privileged and less educated—the education system did not break down class and cultural inequalities but reinforced them. (p. 195)

With the exception of scholarship students, barring admission to those families who cannot afford these school's exorbitant tuition fees allows the economically privileged to access educational resources and opportunities that are not afforded to members from lower socio-economic classes. Many of these independent schools are acutely aware that the status of the school is contingent on the future accomplishments of its graduates (Maxwell & Maxwell, 2006). In subscribing to liberal ideas of meritocracy and individualism, elite independent schools can market the achievements of their graduates to those desiring to reproduce similar levels of economic success from their children. Given the various intersections of race and socio-economic status which may occur within these schools, the dynamics of unequal distribution of economic and institutional power may prove to influence the narratives shared throughout this study.

Various terms are used throughout the research to signify schools that fall under the category of “independent schools”. Some of the categories of schools include: private schools, independent schools, elite schools, and charter schools. Kane (1991) describes independent schools as schools that have six defining features that include: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size. Kraushaar (1972) explains that the term “private school” can also be used to describe independent schools but may also carry a more politically charged and “pejorative connotation” (p. 54). Both private and independent schools are not publicly funded and, as such, are not accountable to the public (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). For the purposes of this study, I will be using the term independent school and private school interchangeably.

Another distinction that is important to make is between elite schools, independent/private schools, and charter schools. Elite education serves a particular function in our society that sets them apart from the traditional independent schools. While both independent and elite schools operate under mandates of school choice that allow parents more control over their children’s education, not all independent schools are considered elite. Elite education is meant to reproduce social and cultural behaviours that promote elite status in their students. Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009) explains that “the production of elite status requires five interrelated and co-producing processes- the five E’s of elite education: exclusion, engagement, excellence, entitlement, and envisioning” (p. 62). Although charter schools often share many features of independent schools, Gaztambide-Fernandez and Maudlin (2016) clearly define them as, “publicly funded schools that are exempt from certain state and/or local regulations and governed by the accountability standards stated in their charters” (p.1). This study will generally

focus on experiences of racialized faculty from independent schools rather than charter schools or elite schools.

### **Racialized Teachers**

Another foundational element of this study is the presence of racialized teachers within the institution of independent schools. While Canada, as a country, has experienced profound growth in numbers of its racialized citizens, the teacher workforce has not kept pace with this diversification (Ryan et al., 2009). Presumably, this trend applies equally to the public and independent school system. In 2009, it was found that while racialized minorities made up 16 percent of the total Canadian population, racialized teachers only made-up 7 percent of the teaching population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Lack of recent and quality data on racialized populations in Canada only add to problems around adequately serving these populations (Robson, 2018). Although there may be a variety of reasons to account for the disparity found in 2009, it has been documented that one of the reasons may have to do with discriminatory hiring practices that preclude racialized professionals from receiving the same economic and occupational benefits for their educational pedigree (Galabuzi, 2006, p.12). Sleeter (2001) has noted that institutions with predominantly White populations have responded very slowly to the growing cultural gap between White people and those of other identities. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the voices of racialized minorities within school and community settings are often relegated to the margins (Dei, 1993; Lund & Carr, 2015; Nieto, 2010; Sleeter, 2001). Given the aforementioned relationships between class, race, and privilege, I posit that the disparity between the percentage of racialized students and educators will be equal to, if not, greater within the independent school system. An important question to consider may be: As policy makers and educators continue to promote diversity and inclusion within our educational



institutions, why do there continue to be disparities in representation within our school systems? As a racialized educator working with an independent school, it is these questions that brought me to this narrative inquiry. It is only through a close examination of the stories of the isolated voices within these spaces, and a larger examination of the macrosocial patterns of racialized people across independent schools, that we can begin to understand how to address the equity issues at hand.

Furthermore, allegedly, Canada has built an identity that espouses the values of multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism. Within this context, many institutions operate under the premise that the educational services that are offered are free of cultural bias, and that there is equal cultural influence in policy, practices, and content (Dei, 1993; James, 1995; Lund & Carr, 2015) In spite of the commitments to diversity within federal policy, Canada remains a deeply stratified and hierarchical society that offers unequal access to power and resources contingent on race, class, and gender (Dei, 1993, p.32). The myth of meritocracy that is embraced by many public educational institutions fails to acknowledge the structural inequalities that affect the difference in educational outcomes experienced by members from varying minoritized identities (Freire, 1964; hooks, 1993). The extent to which these structural inequalities manifest in the independent school system within Canada and affect the experiences of racialized faculty within these settings is yet to be determined.

### **Problem Statement**

It is estimated that, by 2025, 20 percent of the current population of Canada will be “people of colour” (Driedger & Halli, 1999). In response to this pluralism, Canada as a nation-state has developed a cultural identity that ostensibly espouses the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion (Dei, 2005). Despite this purported identity, we continue to see deficits in

representation for racialized people within school curriculum, policy, and teaching workforce (Galzubi, 2006). Independent schools, given their exclusivity, may be institutions where these issues of representation and equity are exacerbated for racialized populations (Gaztambide-Fernandez & DiAquoi, 2010). There is very little information regarding the experiences of racialized teachers within independent school settings in Canada.

### **Purpose and Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of racialized teachers within the independent school system in Canada. It is a critical exploration of the challenges, barriers, and successes that racialized teachers experience within independent schools. Using Narrative Inquiry as a methodological framework, each narrative will be positioned within the context of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and then analyzed through an integrative theoretical framework which draws on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a decolonial practice. This study hopes to amplify the voices of racialized faculty within the independent school system and in doing so, help elucidate the themes of inequity that continue to exist within these institutions. With a deeper understanding of the professional experiences of racialized faculty within independent school contexts, these institutions can work towards material changes that result in more equitable schooling practices.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this narrative inquiry is: *What are the experiences of racialized teachers in the context of independent schools in Canada?*

Within this overarching research question, the following research sub-questions will be used to guide the inquiry:

- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within the independent school system contributed to their understanding of race?
- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within independent schools informed their understanding of power dynamics and privilege in the school system?

### **Significance of the Study**

The genesis of this study was the profound lack of information available about the experiences of racialized peoples within the independent school context. Although there are several researchers that study diversity, race, and equity issues in the Canadian educational context, (see also Carr, 2008; Dei, 2007; James, 1995; Lund, 2006), the discourses mostly centre on issues found within Canadian public schools. This poses significant issues for me, both professionally and personally. Having spent 9 years within the independent school system as a middle school teacher, I have experienced varying degrees of interpersonal and systemic racism that have often left me feeling discouraged and demoralized. Without any insight into or understanding of the lived experiences of racialized communities within the contexts of independent schools, there is little hope for making meaningful changes towards more equitable and inclusive educational experiences of participants. This study is important, if we as Canadians, believe that the ideals of equity should be extended to all demographics who attend and teach within independent schools.

The potential benefits and implications of this study could be far-reaching. On a personal level, it will help me understand and process my experiences as a racialized educator within independent schools. Additionally, it will help provide a more robust toolkit for other racialized

teachers entering the independent school system. On a professional level, it will open transformative possibilities in the areas where independent schools are succeeding and failing their racialized faculty. From a systemic perspective, it is hoped that these critical insights will result in helping to create more inclusive and equitable working and learning environments for racialized peoples within independent schools. There may also be benefits for the participants of the study, who will, hopefully, experience an “arousal effect” (Brown & Tandom, 1978) that reorients their perceptions of the issues in their schools and empowers them to act towards substantive changes (Lather, 2003). Additionally, it will help provide a more robust toolkit for other racialized teachers entering the independent school system and non-racialized allies hoping to support work within equity, inclusion, and decolonization. In some small way, I hope this research is a catalyst for transformation. By reading this work, I hope you, the reader, are transformed as I have been transformed by this research. I hope we all walk away from this research more inspired and with more capacity to create solutions and change the systems within which we work and live.

## **Research Design**

This study will use narrative inquiry as framed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to examine the experiences of racialized faculty within independent school settings. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant over the course of a six month period. Each of the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each of the interviews were written into narratives alongside the participants. Narrative inquiry relies on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make meaning of our experiences by imposing story structures (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is then both a methodology and an ontology (Clandinin, 2013). Some humans think of their lives through the framework of

narrative. Clandinin speaks of narrative inquiry as a relational methodology in that thinking about our studying the unfolding lives of the participants through narrative assumes a collaboration between researcher, participant over time.

Narrative Inquiry engages a Deweyan view of experience in that it “acknowledges the embodiment of the person living in the world” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18). Deweyan pragmatism operates under the assumption that experience is both a personal and social phenomenon. As such, this narrative inquiry will position all of the participant’s narratives within a three dimensional narrative inquiry space that supports examining each story within and through the relational matrix of continuity, interaction, and situation.

### **Researcher Assumptions**

I come to this research with a host of assumptions. Foremost, I am assuming that the phenomenon of experience is, “a continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Using this particular ontology of experience opens the door for narrative inquirers to position their descriptions of experience in ways that are relational and transactional (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In other words, the narrative inquirer is not necessarily looking for a narrative that is a faithful representation of reality, but rather to describe experience in ways that focus on the meaning created by the subject in relation with their environment.

Secondly, I am making the assumption that the experience of racialized peoples within independent schools will have marked features distinctly different from that of the experience of racialized peoples working in public schools. There have been several scholars writing on the experiences of racialized peoples within the context of the public school system (see Ladson-Billings, 1991; Phillip, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Villegas & Davis, 2008), but none address the ways

that the experience of racialized teachers may be different in the independent school system in Canada. Similarly, I am assuming that the experience of racialized faculty within independent schools will have features markedly different than that of their White counterparts.

### **Operational Definitions:**

- **Ethnicity:** Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) wrote that, “ethnicity refers to people bound by a common language, culture, spiritual tradition, and/or ancestry” (p. 23). The notion of ethnicity is socially constructed and overlaps intimately with ideas of race.
- **Intersectionality:** The idea of intersectionality is derived from Black feminist literature which states that the social constructions of race, class, gender, and the like are interwoven and must be considered simultaneously when examining issues of power, oppression, violence, and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1993; Davis, 1981).
- **Independent Schools:** Pelt (2017) of the Fraser Institute defined independent schools as private or not-for-profit organizations that are designed to offer distinct pedagogical or religious mandates.
- **Minoritized Group:** Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) defined minoritized groups as those that are positioned in opposition to the dominant group. These groups historically have been devalued and, as such, have less access to resources of society.
- **Race:** This study uses the word “race” to describe the socially constructed superficial categories that have been built around identity markers such as skin colour, eye colour, and hair texture (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). These categories have no biological basis but, as a social construct, have a material effect on such things as where we live, which schools we attend, and our partner preferences, amongst other things.

- **Racism:** Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) defined racism as the “forms of oppression in which one racial group dominates over another” (p. 187). This definition refers to the group dynamics that result from the dominant group exercising a combination of racial prejudice and institutional power.
- **Racialized Teachers:** Ng (2003) refers to “racialization” as being the act of assigning specific meanings to groups on the basis of their physical differences even though “race” has proved to be a “social fabrication”. (p.210). For the purposes of this study, the term racialized teacher will be used to signify those educators who hold markers of difference that have been encoded with racial meaning.
- **(Socioeconomic) Class:** refers to the system of relative social rank as measured in terms of income, wealth, status, and/or power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017)

## Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter provided an overview of the context, problem, purpose, and the research questions of this inquiry. Discussion in the chapter included: the various assumptions I bring to the research, I positioned myself within the context of the research, outlined the significance of the study, and in addition, provided definitions of key terms. In the following chapter, I explore the literature on independent schools, various elements of schooling contexts, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a decolonial practice. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, methodology, sampling, data collection, and methods of analysis. Further, I will explain the ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations of my research. In Chapter 4, I will offer the findings of the study in the form of narratives alongside my own narrative about being a racialized educator within independent schools. In Chapter 5 & 6, I will use a theoretical framework of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a decolonial practice in analyzing salient

themes from the narratives. Chapter 7 offers recommendations to the independent school system and personal reflections arising from the writing of this dissertation.



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this study, I explored the narratives of racialized faculty within the independent school system. For the purposes of my research, I conducted a critical review of related literature throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis phases of the study.

This critical review of the literature examined the interconnectedness between several important concepts pertaining to the context of the phenomena that this study seeks to understand. Foundational to the study are four topics or major areas of literature which were critically reviewed: (a) independent schools, (b) culturally sustaining pedagogy, (c) decolonization, and (d) other critical pedagogies. A review of literature regarding independent schools provided an understanding of the environmental context in which racialized teachers must navigate. Culturally sustaining pedagogy was critically reviewed to create an understanding of the possibilities of a pedagogical approach that fully integrates the experiences of racialized teachers into the independent school setting. Literature promoting decolonization was critically examined as a theoretical framework in which culturally sustaining pedagogy is with a view to understanding and addressing systemic inequity found within independent schools. Lastly, I reviewed other pedagogical approaches previously recommended by scholars, to highlight and critique these theoretical possibilities for how they contribute to addressing systemic inequities found within independent schools.

To conduct this selected literature review, I used multiple information sources, including books, internet resources, and professional peer reviewed journals. These sources were accessed through ERIC, University of Calgary Library website, and ProQuest. No specific delimiting time frame was used to conduct this search. The key words used to narrow and guide during the search include: “independent schools”, “culturally sustaining pedagogy”, “decolonization”, and

“critical pedagogy in education”, “critical multiculturalism”, “integrative anti-racism”, “anti-oppressive education”, “racialized teachers”, “whiteness studies”.

Throughout the review of earlier studies, I attempted to both highlight important concepts that will inform the study of the phenomenon at hand, but also to draw important distinctions between similar and related concepts within the four categories of the major foundational areas described above. In the next section, I explain how the topics discussed in the literature review contribute to the development of the study’s conceptual framework.

### **Independent Schools**

Bourdieu and Passerson (1978) explain the relationship between education, educational institutions, families, and the transference of social class position which exacerbates inequality and exclusion. Exorbitant tuition prices and exclusive admission policies are a few of the barriers independent schools utilize to reproduce cultures of social exclusion and economic inequality in our society. Kane (1991) describes independent or private schools to have the features of: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size. While independent schools largely function within these tenets, they are far from culturally homogenous. For example, both charter schools and elite schools fall under the category of independent schools but are very different when considering school culture. In the following pages, I will describe the different types of schools found within the independent school landscape and their functions within society, the demographics and culture found within independent schools, and challenges and opportunities that can be found within these independent schools. By describing the full spectrum, I hope to give you, the reader, a more concrete understanding of the independent school landscape.

Gaztambide-Fernandez and Maudlin (2016) posit that the proliferation of the independent schools across the United States and Canada is driven by school choice initiatives that seek to give parents more control over the children's educational experiences. Charter schools and elite independent schools are branches of the independent school movement that provide unique opportunities for their clientele and have distinct school cultures. Charter schools extend school choice options to parents by offering specialized programming such as a focus on arts, science, or athletics. Whereas charter schools operate with support from public funding, they are not tethered to the same policies that govern the public school system. This allows charter schools to operate culturally similarly to public schools without the constraints of local curriculum. While these schools exercise admissions testing, and interviews/auditions for their prospective students, they are more accessible to the public than elite independent schools because of lower tuition demands.

In contrast, elite independent schools are designed to produce elite status that require five interrelated and co-producing processes: *exclusion, engagement, excellence, entitlement, and envisioning* (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). *Exclusion* can be formalized through a school's admission process or it may be embedded into school culture that promotes *excellence* to affirm belonging. Elite institutions instill culture by providing access to *engage* with opportunities that are deemed important by high-status groups. In these spaces, students are often driven by performance metrics that demonstrate and validate their excellence, which in turn, drives their sense of *entitlement*. These different metrics intertwine to allow students who attend these institutions to project and *envision* an elite future. These elite independent schools are very different from charter schools in that elite independent schools actively work on their own behalf to create and maintain their appeal of distinction for the relatively privileged. Ultimately, the

function of elite independent schools is to, “socialize upper-class recruits into the operational values required for the successful exercise of power” (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010). Another tier of elite independent schools is elite boarding schools that offer a unique cultural experience to their demographics due to the fact that the majority of their student body lives in dormitory style residential halls for most of the academic year. In a study on elite boarding schools in the United States, Gammerman (2007) posits that elite schools typically had \$100 million in an endowment fund, had an average combined SAT score of 1,800, and were typically founded before 1900. Although these United States based criteria may be limiting to precisely define elite boarding schools, it provides a starting point to understand what constitutes an elite boarding school. Through the extensive research conducted by Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009) on elite boarding schools, we begin to see the differences between an elite independent school and an elite boarding school. While the culture of many elite independent day schools may resemble those found within well-resourced public schools, their access to financial resources allows them to carefully curate their communities and create a culture that sets them apart. Elite boarding schools usually have several academic departments including classical and modern languages, access to numerous artistic and athletic opportunities outside the classroom, and unparalleled quality facilities where students may explore curricular and extra-curricular interests. Although charter schools, elite schools, and elite boarding schools all fall under the category of independent schools, each occupy a unique niche within the educational landscape and carry distinct cultural features.

Although the studies concerning independent schools are sparse, there are a number of studies that should be highlighted to gain further insights into the cultures present within these educational contexts. Stoudt et al. (2010) examined the influence of hegemonic masculinity

within elite private institutions. Hegemonic masculinity within an elite private day school for boys was examined through a participatory action research model. The researchers found that verbal and physical bullying presented itself through the behaviors of teasing, intimidation, hazing rituals, and physical violence (Stoudt, 2007). The researchers found that bullying was not only a student problem, but it was also an institutional problem embedded within the culture through hyper competitiveness and the hierarchical nature of the school. In another study conducted by Gaztambide-Fernandez and DiAquoi (2010), studying the experiences of racialized students within elite boarding schools, researchers found themes of internal and external exclusion. Cookson and Persell (1991) terms this phenomena as “outsiders within”, in that racialized people felt caught between the world of upper-class culture and their home communities, never being fully accepted into either (p. 220). Furthermore, researchers also found that racialized students within these settings found the negotiation of the boundaries of their racial identities as a skillset that would be valuable into their future. Many of the students thought of their racial identities as assets that could be leveraged as they moved into elite environments beyond their high school experience. Both of these studies offered valuable insights into how the various relations of power within independent schools influenced the construction of identities and relationships amongst the school community.

Ostensibly, independent schools are institutions where “privilege” is cultivated and reproduced within school culture. Swalwell (2013) defines “privileged students” as those that are positioned by power relations within systems of supremacy that are continuously shaped by historical, social, political, and economic factors, and that are made stronger when rendered invisible, consciously or not, to those who benefit from them most (p. 6)

Whether one is talking about race, class, gender or the like, it is understood that part of the profile of privileged individuals involves a lack of consciousness around one's privileges and benefits. It is also important to note the interrelationships of these identities as they pertain to independent schools. Leonardo (2009) explains how capitalism, Whiteness, and patriarchy intimately intertwine. While there are very few statistical studies of the exact racial demographics of independent schools across Canada (see; Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995), it would be no surprise to learn that independent schools are not only bastions of privilege but also of Whiteness.

Swalwell (2013) examined the different types of behavioural responses that privileged students in two charter schools had to learning about injustice through a social justice pedagogical approach. She explains that the students fell into four distinct categories of responses: The Benevolent Benefactor, The Meritocrat, The Resigned, and the Activist Ally. The Benevolent Benefactor acknowledges and appreciates their privilege but also engages in charitable acts towards others. The Meritocrat removes and distances themselves from the injustice by explaining that inequity results from bad powerful people acting unethically. The Resigned archetype frames social change as an unrealistic endeavour while still engaging in the theoretical understandings of structural inequality. Lastly, the Activist Ally considers how to enter the matrix of efforts to combat injustice on structural and individual levels. A similar study conducted by Howard (2010) sought to explore student resistance to the dominant culture within their elite school setting. Howard (2010) found that both students in the study actively resisted the dominant culture at their elite independent schools to develop more meaningful relationships with groups different from themselves and finding meaning in their lives outside the cultural norms found within the dominant culture at their school. Studies like the ones conducted by

Howard and Swalwell provide us with valuable insights into the cultures at two different independent schools and how to support students within these schools to make individual and structural changes in service of a more equitable world.

Many scholars have discussed the role of the education system within the colonial project (see; Battiste, 2013, Smith, 2013, Patel, 2021); but very few have explored the specific relationship that independent schools have to historical and ongoing settler colonialism. Angod and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2019) explain the unique relationship that elite boarding schools have in the settler-colonial project and the formation of elite subjects that learn to reproduce colonialism. The authors explain that these elite boarding schools use their carefully curated pastoral landscapes and curriculum to give their students a feeling of limitlessness. Elite boarding schools prepare their students with a global citizenship mindset, an idea rooted in coloniality, as it teaches students that they are entitled to have unlimited access to land unencumbered by borders (Patel, 2021). This perspective raises many valuable questions about the role of independent schools in the colonial project and what a decolonized independent schooling system would look and feel like for its students and faculty. What agenda is being served in independent schools? How can independent schools operate in a decolonized manner? Is this a plausible endeavour given the historical agenda of these schools?

Overwhelmingly, the scant literature on independent schools paints the picture that these institutions are places where privilege and inequity are learned and reproduced. Whether the independent school in question is a charter or an elite boarding school, there have been calls for them to open their doors to those that have been historically excluded from these institutions, but there is also a push to pursue an educational agenda within these spaces that can address the inequality that they reproduce (Khan, 2021). The different cultural elements examined through

the literature bolster the assertion that while inequality and injustice are not intended goals of educational policy within independent schools; the inequity in these institutions is not incidental (Gillborn, 2008). While it may be difficult to generalize across independent schools, it may be more valuable to address the ways in which each type of independent school demonstrates relationships to the reproduction of power, hierarchies, and unequal access to resources. This study aims to illuminate the ways in which racialized faculty interact with these various elements found within independent schools.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Road to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Anti-racist scholars agree on the values of equity, inclusivity, and diversity, but how these values should be implemented and enacted in the school system may look different depending on the perspective of the scholar. This section of my literature review will highlight key ideological differences and similarities between several voices in the study of anti-racist education.

In her seminal work, *The Case for Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy*, Ladson Billings (1995) investigated the school experiences of eight teachers of African American students to argue that a new theoretical framework is required to better serve students from traditionally underserved communities. Building off Freirean notions of democratic education, Ladson-Billings (1995) posited that pedagogy should not only be about the transfer of content from teacher to student but should work towards awakening the critical consciousness of students. She proposed that, in order for pedagogy to be considered “culturally-relevant,” it must satisfy three develop students academically, support cultural competence, and cultivate socio-political critical consciousness. These ideas inspired a movement within the American education system by providing tangible



measures to address the achievement gap between Black and White students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Although this idea of culturally-relevant pedagogy transformed the practice of many teachers in the United States, many scholars considered it incomplete and felt it did not go far enough to value the cultures of the students that were the subjects of the pedagogy. Building off of Ladson-Billings' (1995) initial idea, Paris (2012) offered the critique that having a pedagogy that is "culturally-relevant" does not go far enough to support racialized peoples in their attempts to navigate the school system in a way that allows them to sustain the languages and cultures that are practiced at home. She argued for a bolder approach that she entitled: culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). A culturally-sustaining pedagogy (CSP) would require teachers to support young people in their cultural and linguistic practices outside of school while still offering them skills that will allow them access to competencies used by the dominant culture (Paris, 2012). I would agree with Paris' analysis in saying that culturally relevant pedagogy does not go far enough to address the issues of assimilation that are forced upon racialized students through an implicitly racist education system. Years later, Ladson-Billings (2014) would also co-sign this "remix" of her original idea by saying, "I hope to help those who subscribe to earlier visions of culturally relevant pedagogy make the transition to the remix: culturally sustaining pedagogy. For, if we ever get to a place of complete certainty and assuredness about our practice, we will stop growing" (p. 77). With an example of using hip hop jargon, Ladson-Billings bolstered Paris' call for a culturally-sustaining pedagogy and humbly encouraged the examination and evolution of all equity informed pedagogical practices.

Bucholtz, Casillas and Lee (2017) explain that there are two motivating premises for enacting a Culturally Sustaining approach to education. The first premise rests on the notion that

culture is to be sustained. The second premise is that it is culture, “produced primarily via language, that endows experience with meaning and provides a deeply held sense of identity and social belonging” (p. 45). This approach to CSP highlights and underscores the importance of sustaining linguistic practices. It also points at the hegemony within traditional schooling that privileges whiteness, monolingualism, and English as the primary modes of communication. Deficit discourses circulating within public educational policy continue to attack racialized students for using language that does not conform to adult norms of appropriateness, correct, or proper. It is from this perspective that CSP argues that language and culture are deeply interwoven and are essential to the sustenance of identity.

San Pedro (2017) suggests that a classroom grounded in CSP must move beyond traditional notions of creating safety for their students. “Such pursuits of safety and feelings of comfort often leave Indigenous students and other racialized students on the margins of classroom discourses” (San Pedro, 2015). Instead, San Pedro encourages educators to orient towards co-creating a *sacred truth space*, that enables students to engage in the vulnerable act of telling and hearing multiple truths. In these spaces, San Pedro (2017) argued that co-creating a *sacred truth space* with students teaches them to humanize dialogue where conversations are not won or lost, but rather create a deeper mutual understanding. In sacred truth spaces, there is a critical centering of student’s abilities to share their realities and experiences that counter/correct/challenge knowledge that often lead to the painful silencing of historically marginalized people (San Pedro, 2015). These spaces are aligned with Paris (2012) vision of CSP as a democratic project of schooling.

There are several pedagogical possibilities for incorporating CSP imbued learning environments. According to Holmes and Gonzales (2017), one such possibility for an CSP-

centered approach to learning from Indigenous epistemologies would be to include Elders in the classroom setting. Indigenous learning must include involving Elders into the learning environment and placing youth into the intergenerational circle. Holmes and Gonzales (2017) explain that an Elder within Indigenous society is not defined by chronological age but rather are “evolved beings who possess significant knowledge of the sacred and secular ways of their people, and who act as role models, often assuming leadership positions in their communities” (p. 208). By drawing upon her own experiences with Lakota Elder Rosalie Little Thunder (2017), the authors remind us that Elders animate what traditional, self-determining, and decolonizing Indigenous pedagogy looked like through oral intergenerational transmission and by living the teachings:

This is the power of oral intergenerational transmission. It is simultaneously a practical and spiritual process to be honored. The gifts we are given, that Elders have chosen to share with us, the wisdom of their lives, mirror and animate the wisdom and experience of *their* grandparents, ancestors all the way around. (p. 210)

In this way, learning from Elders may not look familiar to many students rooted in Eurocentric approaches to education that privilege knowledge from textbooks and experts. Youth remains an important part of this process, and such, must be placed within the proper container of intergenerational learning for the teaching to be passed on. Holmes and Gonzalez (2017) explain that meaningful connection between youth and Elders is integral to the “survival and continuance of the People” (p. 220) and a pedagogy without this connection would be incongruent with Indigenous ways of knowing and collective knowledge production. A CSP approach to Indigenous education draws on relational practices that locates learning as a collective endeavour rather than just an individual one.

Another pedagogical possibility for CSP is the inclusion of Hip Hop epistemology within the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2017) talks about her experiences building a university course around Hip Hop pedagogy to ensure the teacher preparation program at her university was sending students out into the community with an understanding of the demographics they would be teaching. Her teacher training program includes such things as cyphers, spoken word exercises, and introductions to hip hop dance. Ladson-Billings highlights the ways in which Hip Hop culture can be leveraged as a form of youth culture with roots in provocative social and political commentary. This was one of many examples of the innovation and creativity that is possible within a praxis rooted in CSP.

There are a few pitfalls that accompany the possibilities for CSP as a framework. Wong and Pena (2017), explain that there may be a tendency for educators to be too heavily focused on *damage-centered narratives* (Tuck, 2009) when doing this work in classrooms. They argue that while addressing the pain and suffering involved in their experiences is extremely important, it cannot be where the work ends. “Too often the pain is centered without an equal centering of joy” (Wong & Pena, 2017, p. 131). CSP needs to ensure that complete stories of young people and their communities are told.

Paris and Alim (2017) remind us that although CSP offers us a guiding framework for revitalizing and sustaining culture within education, it is far from comprehensive. As such, educators must ground their approach to CRP with local context, grade level, and community needs. It is important to note that these approaches may not be appropriate for every context. It will be incumbent on the teacher to know which approaches are appropriate for the context of their classroom community. This will require training and education for classroom educators. In

Chapter 6, I will return to an exploration of the practical possibilities and limitations of CSP within the independent school system.

## **Decolonization**

For many educators, the words “coloniality” and “decolonize” when used in the context of education are often seen as divisive and politically charged. Maldonado-Torres (2010) explains that coloniality:

...refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations...It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (p. 97)

To this day, legacies of colonialism remain deeply embedded in our educational institutions (see Battiste, 2013; Patel, 2015, 2021; Smith, 2012). We can see the remnants of coloniality found within our education system in the forms of: bans on ethnic studies, proliferation of reductive curricula, disproportionate suspension/expulsion rates for racialized youth, increasing levels of school segregation, and various other assaults on agency, culture and languages (Dominguez, 2017). Furthermore, Gill et al. (2012) reminds us of the various ways that “research” as conducted and framed by the western academy has caused “epistemological and ontological wounds” (p. 11) that researchers should be mindful of, even when they are using decolonial frameworks within their methodological practices.

## Decolonizing Methodologies

In her now classic work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), Smith traces the links between the European historical period called The Enlightenment, colonialism, and how this relationship has come to structure our current epistemological framework of research. This framework informs our understanding of which knowledge systems are valid. She uses Said's (1990) notion of "positional superiority" to explain the ways that Europe used its military strength to not only steal material wealth from countries but also discover, extract, appropriate and distribute knowledge. It is through the organized and systematic approach of colonialism that Indigenous ways of knowing and being have been repackaged and resold to the world for consumption. A prime example of this includes the appropriation of Indigenous plants and herbs in new-age spiritual communities. Furthermore, this distortion becomes the lens through which colonized peoples have come to understand fragmented reflections themselves.

Smith (2012) explains that with the advent of "Modernity", came a shift from feudalism and absolute authoritarian rule towards an industrial revolution that focused on the individual. Colonial explorations that focused on scientific thought, discovery of other worlds, expansion of trade, and systematic colonization of Indigenous people were all elements of the modernist project. The production and conceptions of knowledge, validity of specific types of knowledge, and ideas about the nature of knowledge became commodities of colonialism just as much as natural resources. Enlightenment philosophies, the industrial revolution, and scientific discoveries became the vehicle through which illusory notions of the Other were conceptualized for and by Europeans. The colonized were 'objects', stripped of their life force, humanity, and spirit. "Thus, indigenous Asian, American, Pacific and African forms of knowledge, systems of classification, technologies and codes of social life, which began to be recorded in some detail by

the seventeenth century, were regarded as new discoveries by Western science” (p. 17, Smith, 2012).

It is during this same time period that Europe engaged in an era of highly competitive collecting (read: stealing), which included territories, species of flora and fauna, mineral resources, and of cultures. Europeans believed this collecting was done in service to Indigenous people who could not be trusted to care for these cultural artifacts themselves. For example, many plant species such as maize, sweet potatoes, and tobacco were taken from their indigenous lands in South America and introduced to other colonies as a way to ‘strengthen and develop’ indigenous plant systems. This form of what Smith (2012) refers to as “botanical colonization” (p. 18), led to the extinction of several plant, animal, and bird life. Similarly, viral and bacterial infection were spread to Indigenous populations as weapons of war to decimate the Indigenous populations (Smith, 2012). The concept of the ‘survival of the fittest’, used to explain the evolution of the species in the natural world, was enthusiastically applied to the human world (Smith, 2012). An imaginary division of East and West was formally written into existence by the Papal Bull of 1493.

Colonial education systems in the form of religious or missionary schooling, followed by public and secular schooling, when applied in Indigenous communities, became a major conduit for imposing positional superiority over knowledge, language, and culture. Smith (2012) argued that although the purpose of schooling was to assimilate and deny Indigenous peoples of their language, knowledge, and culture; not all Indigenous peoples were permitted to attend as many were deemed ‘ineducable’. As a result, a class of ‘Indigenous elite’ were created by those students who could assimilate to the cultural and economic interests of the colonizing group.

Universities became a key part of the colonization process, as they represented markers of a civilization's maturity. Attempts to incorporate indigenous epistemologies and ontologies into university curriculum has come with conflict over what counts as knowledge, literature, curriculum and the like. Most of the disciplines taught in university systems are grounded in a European cultural worldview devoid of other knowledge systems. Smith (2012) explains to us that, "underpinning all of what is taught at universities is the belief in the concept of science as the all-embracing method for gaining an understanding of the world" (p. 68). In her view, newly found colonies became the testing laboratories for Western science.

Notions of the 'Other' and distinctions between the 'civilized' and 'savages' became more prominent during the eighteenth century, which lead to these terms being incorporated into various academic disciplines. Anthropology is one discipline which was complicit in the objectified study and naming of the Other as primitive. Similarly, geography was used to draw links between climate and mental abilities, and the mapping of racial differences. History was written by the colonizer, and in the process of recording said history, denied and deformed the experiences and perspectives of the Other. Research teams within these academic disciplines absolved themselves of any ethical responsibility for the impact on the Other by insulating themselves behind research rhetoric relating to academic freedom, the search for truth, and democracy.

Smith (2012) argued that the term 'discipline' is a way to, not only organize systems of knowledge, but also to organize people and bodies. The colonized were disciplined through methods of exclusion, denial, and marginalization. Indigenous ways of knowing and being, along with physical bodies, were pushed to the boundaries for "efficient supervision, and for simultaneous distinctions to be made between individuals"(p. 37). The most salient example of



this is residential schools, where students were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to school designed to destroy language and memories of home. Curriculum and assessment are both used as tools of marginalization for Indigenous youth in the public schooling system as they privilege the cultural capital of white middle classes.

The rise of the colonial education system has also produced a class of Indigenous scholars that Smith (2012) problematically identifies as the ‘native intellectual’. She states:

There were concerns that native intellectuals ay have become estranged from their own cultural values to the point of being embarrassed by, and hostile towards, all that those values represented...What is problematic is that this group of men have been named by the dominant non-indigenous population as individuals who represent ‘real’ leadership. They have been idealized as ‘saviours of the people’ and their example remains as ‘measure’ of real leadership. (p. 73)

The idea of the ‘native intellectual’ points to the ambivalence that Indigenous communities continue to have towards the role of Western education and those who have been educated under colonial logics taught in universities. This has been combated in some Indigenous contexts by a re-privileging of ‘elders’ as the holders of traditional knowledge systems and a simultaneous de-privileging of younger university educated tribal members.

Questions of ‘authenticity’ and what constitutes a ‘real indigenous person’ are tied to political debates designed to fragment and marginalize those who speak for Indigenous issues. Smith (2012) explains that “the purpose of commenting on such a concept is that what counts as ‘authentic’ is used by the West as one of the criteria to determine who is really Indigenous, who is worth saving, and who is still free from Western contamination” (p. 77). The essence of these debates can be boiled down into the colonial belief that Indigenous cultures are static, simple, and fixed. However, in the Indigenous world, the heart of the debates around authenticity are rooted in issues of spirituality, relationships to the land, and the universe, ideas that Western

systems of knowledge have a difficult time understanding. As such, Indigenous spirituality remains a critical site of resistance for Indigenous peoples.

### **Decolonizing Educational Research**

Patel (2015) draws our attention to the idea that even the most potent critiques of societal structures are devoid of theories that bring about material transformation for marginalized communities. She urges critical scholars to take pause from the busyness of identity politics that often recentres coloniality and move towards “generative spaces beyond” (p. 3). Through a thoughtful reflection of her own scholarship and educational practices, she offers the reader important questions around the ubiquity of terms such as: decolonization, occupation, and sovereignty. She questions the role of schooling in the purported goals of teaching, learning, and growth of individuals. The project of schooling has had more to do with agendas of coloniality, social reproduction, and re-inscribing preferred knowledge systems than of education. She extends the same sinister gaze onto educational research in its role in the colonial project and offers the opportunity for researchers to take pause from the unexamined habits that have been reproduced from coloniality and proposes epistemic shifts towards research from an anti-colonial stance.

Patel (2015) also carefully draws the difference between anti colonial and decolonial practices. ‘Anticolonial’ is defined as the ways in which coloniality must be known and countered, whereas ‘decolonial’ should always address the material changes. More importantly, “anti-colonial and decolonial praxis is not consecutive, but to decolonize does require the apprehension and unsettling of coloniality” (p. 7). Patel (2015) also draws the important distinction between ‘settler colonialism’ and ‘coloniality’ by stating:

Settler colonialism's fulcrum is the land; coloniality more broadly is about the stratification of beingness to serve accumulation of material and land. A text can make visible coloniality but it does not, in and of itself, shift material relations among human beings, including their connections to the land and other beings. (p. 7)

Through offering these various definitions and pauses for reflection, Patel urges the reader to engage in the globally shared responsibility towards decolonization by reminding us of the perniciousness and pervasiveness of coloniality in all of our lives.

Educational research is non-neutral and imbued with contextually situated meaning that carry material impacts. Similarly, higher education has been leveraged in political spheres to drive the 'myth of meritocracy' instead of being critically examined for the ways in which this, too, may perpetuate the colonial agenda. For example, rhetoric around the 'achievement gap' centres white students while looking at their racialized peers through a deficit lens. Patel (2015) urges scholars to ask deeper questions around what "function and dysfunction" (p. 17) the achievement gap plays and if it can even be closed without directly confronting coloniality.

Coloniality leans on practices of naming and sorting of the whole into its separate parts as a step in the inspection of systems but, in doing so, contaminates the production of insights by relating to those parts through power and control. This manifests in educational research that focuses on study of the parts at the expense of the whole. Patel (2015) brings our attention to the ways that this pattern manifests within educational research as doctoral students are taught to identify and isolate variables within their research study while ignoring the various interconnected structures and contexts that privilege some populations while marginalizing others. "The meaning that is being made leaves the material conditions uninterrogated, in many ways, securing those material conditions"(p. 23). It is within these contexts that power is left unexamined and differential relations to power are reproduced for the privileged. For these

reasons, Patel (2015) argued that educational research is complicit in a system that normalizes the privileges of some and pathologizes and marginalizes others.

Patel (2015) posits that research is fundamentally a relational endeavor that requires a complication of the, “overly linear conceptualization of cause, effect, objectivity, and implications’ (p. 48). Indigenous knowledge systems challenge Euro-centric scientific notions that we can separate and isolate the material and social contexts that are studied through research. Patel references Barad’s (2007) idea of ‘intra-action’ to explain that all matter, and ways of knowing about matter, are impermanently and dynamically interconnected within socio political, economic, and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Patel (2015) challenges the authoritative foothold that quantitative designs have within Western research by problematizing ideals of reliability, validity, and generalizability, and explaining the influence of market forces. Indigenous worldviews see all living beings and the planet in constant flux, and thus, question the notions that things can be measured in isolation, “unhinged from the measurer or the specifics of place” (p. 52). However, these design constraints have not been considered in social sciences where the influence of quantitative design is still prevalent. Furthermore, Patel (2015) highlights the interconnections between a research and the economic market forces at play in a settler society designed to stratify society based on capital and access to land. This is why the academy continues to be concentrated with upper middle class white researchers and reproduces inequality within research.

Patel (2015) goes on to probe the academy with important questions regarding who and why one should engage in research. Instead of worrying about the gaps in research, she draws

attention to the ethical and relational responsibilities that social science research should attend to.

She explains:

While we have a responsibility to understand, contribute to, and be fluent in existing research, we also are responsible for our ontological entry points and impacts as researchers. Because all research is conducted by living beings, with specific histories, we are beholden to consider and answer, perhaps, always incompletely, the three core questions of “Why me?”, “Why this?”, “Why now?”. (p.57)

Patel (2015) goes into detail regarding these three-pointed questions. With regards to the question, “Why me?”, Patel urges social science researchers to embed reflexive practices that allow for reflection on their ethical responsibilities throughout their studies, instead of including a few bracketed paragraphs within the first few paragraphs of a research study. With regards to the question, “Why this?”, Patel (2015) explains that the theoretical lens that a researcher chooses to use during a study must be interrogated regarding their social locations and subsequent potential oversights. Often, social science research is devoid of this critical analysis and considerations that Patel asserts leave research complicit in perpetuating inequity. Finally, with regards to questions of “Why Now and Why here”, Patel (2015) probes researchers to situate and attend to the context, place, temporality, as a way to interrupt coloniality. “Learning and knowledge are never placeless. How humans and nonhumans learn and grow is always situated in specific places, in specific dynamics” (p. 61). Attending to these various questions, Patel (2015) hopes to interrupt the coloniality integrated within social science research by moving more mindfully towards the relational responsibilities, and simultaneously away from typical academic processes that inform research. However, she cautions that institutions should “not lurch uniformly to adopt a particular epistemic stance, methodology, or approach” (p. 64), as most are not fluent or ready to address the influences and impacts of coloniality on their

institutional structures. Such a process would only lead to “cosmetic changes” (p. 65) that would do little to interrupt material coloniality.

Patel questions to whom educational research should be answerable. Patel believes not to the referents of property and ownership under colonial logics, but rather, educational researchers should be answerable to the dynamic and interconnected referents of: learning, knowledge, and contexts. While there are examples of rich learning that happens in schooling contexts, schooling in Patels view, should not be confused with learning. Traditionally, learning has been defined as achievement on assessments, in Eurocentric curriculum, taught by Euro-descendant teachers (Patel, 2015). Patel (2015), however, argued that learning is fundamentally about transformation, becoming, unbecoming, and constant inquiry. For educational research to move beyond colonial logics, it requires a radical reframing of how it defines and relates to learning. Secondly, Patel (2015) argued that educational research, in its current form, operates under a research-centric frame of knowledge production, in that knowledge does not exist until someone has discovered it. Rather, research as the pursuit of knowledge should move beyond the anthropocentric notion that knowledge only comes into existence through its measurement by humans. “We should see ourselves as stewards not of specific pieces of knowledge but rather of the productive and generative spaces that allow for finding knowledge” (Patel ,2015, p. 79). This idea directly challenges colonial notions of knowledge as an object, universal, and immutable; and points towards ideas of knowledge as relational, partial, and impermanent, Lastly, Patel (2015) argued that knowledge should be answerable to context, in that, if learning is about transformation and in dynamic relationship with place, then research should directly address the context from which knowledge comes from. A research agenda rooted in decoloniality will require a reconfiguration of “being and being-in-relation to knowledge and learning” (p. 81).

## Decolonizing Education

Battiste (2013) explained that the history of forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples in Canada came to be through the conduits of interconnected political and social systems of Indian agents, residential schools, and contemporary education. She reminds us that all Canadians should be aware of this history as we are complicit in it. There are notable differences between the experience of immigrants and refugees in Canada compared to First Nations peoples. Most immigrants and refugees come to a different country with the expectation that they will be required to learn a particular culture and language. Contrastingly, First Nations peoples have entered a formal agreement with the Crown through treaties that affords them access to resources that assist them to maintain their heritage and culture once their livelihoods were taken away from them. Battiste (2013) reminded us that First Nations education is both an Aboriginal and a treaty right affirmed by the Canadian constitution, but it has been corrupted governmental interest and policy. As a result, Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous peoples around the world feel pushed out by Eurocentric education systems that have taught them to distrust their cultural ways of knowing and being. Battiste (2013) called this process ‘cognitive imperialism’ in which the mind is white-washed using “English education, Eurocentric humanities and science, and living in a Eurocentric context complete with media, books, laws, and values”(p. 26).

While many educational institutions have begun to talk about issues of cultural diversity, inclusion, and equity, there continues to be a lack of materials and resources directed at creating culturally sustaining anti-oppressive education. Battiste (2013) believed that the starting point for this conversation should be to confront and address the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism that continues to be embedded within modern curriculum.

State sanctioned curriculum continues to transmit an imagined Canadian nationalistic culture that does not accurately represents the heritage, or culture and knowledge of the students within the classroom. To this point, Battiste pointed us to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples where it notes that, “Indigenous children suffer extreme forms of exclusion and discrimination, but they are right holders and are therefore entitled, without discrimination, to all the safeguards that are necessary for their survival and protection” (s.9).

The Canadian education system is challenged with the task of designing meaningful and honorable education for Aboriginal people that “recognizes, respects and integrates Aboriginal knowledge, heritages, and ways of life as an integral part of education” (p. 30). This daunting task is hindered by outmoded ways of thinking that view Aboriginal culture as static, unchanging, and homogenous. Often, this task has been placed on Indigenous scholars to prove that their world view is quite different from the narratives constructed about them through cultural ethnographies.

Although efforts have been made to give cultural insights to teachers through pre-service and in-service programs, little has been done to eradicate the stereotyped depictions of Indigenous peoples through curriculum. Battiste (2013) questioned how educators can create relevant educational programs without first addressing issues of cognitive imperialism, reconciliation, and honoring of the diverse heritages and languages of Indigenous peoples. She hopes that one day, we can move away from deficit lenses of looking at Aboriginal students and work towards a ‘trans-systemic’ evaluation of both Indigenous and Euro-Canadian knowledges that can be used to create a curriculum that sustains both. She leaves the readers with important insights into the relationship between Indigenous education and the land by stating:

Indigenous knowledges are diverse learning processes that come from living intimately with the land, working with resources surrounding that



land base, and the relationships that it has fostered over time and place. These are physical, social, and spiritual relationships that continue to be the foundation of its worldviews and ways of knowing that define their relationship with each other and others. (p. 33)

For Battiste (2013), an honest inclusion of Indigenous education must include relational ways of knowing that connect students to the land and Elders. So far, the current rhetoric around diversity, inclusion, and equity found within schools has failed to advocate for Indigenous education because majority educators continue to, “hide their power and privilege in whiteness, and ignore complicities with dominance, difference, and disadvantage” (p. 33).

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a Decolonial Practice**

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is a response to the multitude of ways that schools continue to operate as part of the colonial project (Paris & Alim, 2017). CSP asks educational institutions to evolve beyond what they have traditionally done to address issues of equity and justice. Far too often, the very institutions working towards justice have remained firmly rooted in systems that promote coloniality. For example, rhetoric around closing the “achievement gap” for racialized students continues to centre colonial logics about how to assimilate these students and equip them to read, write, and think like upper-middle class white students (Dominguez, 2017). CSP demands a shift in ontology concerning how teachers view diversity, ways of being in the world, and realities that exist. The shift that is required disrupts the logics of colonialism that govern, not only, the ways that teachers design lessons and teach students, but also the ways in which teachers view themselves and their relationship to coloniality. A decolonial approach to teacher education rooted in CSP will require 5 important elements according to Dominguez (2017, p. 241). Decolonial teacher education must:

1. Displace colonial epistemologies, and foreground epistemologies reflective of youth and community wisdom
2. Engage educators with frameworks of race that capture the dynamic ways in which youth and racial cultural identity is being produced and reimagined.
3. Re-think the ways that field experiences position the expertise of educators in relation to youth and community knowledge.
4. Actively confront coloniality and create alternative frameworks and identities endowed with hope and possibility
5. Engage practices that unpack coloniality and explore liberation in the mundane, everyday work.

A decolonial educator will not only practice, develop and rehearse these elements of CSP within their praxis, they will also be keen on developing a mindset that is required to fully embody them. Dominguez (2017) argued that CSP is not meant to be enacted in incremental steps. Rather, it is meant to be a shift in consciousness for the educator that begins to see their practice through decolonial terms, working towards liberation and decolonization for their students and themselves.

### **Other Pedagogical Approaches**

Similar to ideas about CSP, conceptions of multicultural education appeared in the United States in response to growing inequalities between Black and White learners. While arguably the most ubiquitous of the approaches to address racial inequity in education, there are several different iterations of Multicultural Education that must be demarcated clearly. This literature review will not be addressing notions of conservative multiculturalism that focuses on celebrating differences and upholds colonial perspectives of race. Additionally, I will not address liberal notions of multiculturalism which argue that there is a natural equality between races and advocates for equal participation in the free market (McCarthy, 1988). Instead, for the purposes of this literature review, I will be addressing a specific type of multiculturalism known as critical multiculturalism, a concept that foregrounds racism (Bernal, 2013). Sleeter's (1996) rendition of

multicultural education argued for a pedagogical approach that acts as a form of resistance to dominant modes of schooling and works to dismantle White supremacy. According to Sleeter (1996), the goals of Critical Multiculturalism must be social justice and political transformation and, as such, will be the focus here.

While sharing many of the same values, there are several notable differences between multicultural education and critical pedagogy. Critical multiculturalism was birthed out of the Civil Rights movement in the United States whereas the origins of Critical Pedagogy are rooted in Latin American class movements (Sleeter, 2013). Over time, with more people subscribing to the multicultural education movement, the original meanings associated with the phrase have been lost (Sleeter, 2013). As a result, discussions of power and development of critical consciousness remain central to Critical Pedagogy, whereas in multicultural education, issues of power have been displaced with rhetoric concerning tolerance and acceptance (Sleeter, 2013). For these and other reasons, many racialized teachers treat the multicultural education movement with disdain and are troubled by its benign iterations found in many educational institutions.

The Multicultural Education movement has advocated for change on a variety of educational fronts including, but not limited to, pressing for curriculum developers to include ethnic counter-narratives within state sanctioned curriculums. Many researchers subscribing to the multicultural education movement have gathered evidence to support this push. Ford and Harris (2000) conducted a study on gifted racialized children within middle school to illuminate this problem. They found that all 43 students interviewed for the study expressed a desire to learn more about racialized peoples in school, believed more narratives of racialized people would make school more interesting, and expressed frustration around learning about White people all the time. Studies such as these affirm the notion that the schooling system continues to

fail racialized children by excluding discourses around racial and ethnic identity in the program of studies. This failure may play a large part in the achievement gap that is present for racialized students in North American education systems.

To combat issues of a Euro-centrist classroom curriculum, Sleeter (1996) advocated for the implementation of programs she refers to as Ethnic Studies. She argued that simply infusing racially and ethnically diverse narratives into a Eurocentric curriculum will not have a substantial impact on the attitudes and belief systems of students and, as such, a different approach is required. Sleeter (1996) noted that courses designed around the perspectives and experiences of certain racial and ethnic groups can have a pro-social impact on racialized students and White students alike. Most interestingly, she posited that Ethnic Studies aid in helping racialized students develop an academic identity that is bolstered by, rather than conflicts with, their ethnicity. Furthermore, she believes that Ethnic Studies would benefit both racialized students and White students by providing a space where communities can bridge differences in experience and perspective. Sleeter's idea of an inclusion of an academically rigorous Ethnic Studies program, in my view, would be greatly beneficial to school boards across America that have failed to validate the experiences and identities of racialized peoples. The failure in achievement of racialized students, and subsequent lack of action by school boards, implicitly places the blame for lack of achievement on the victims of a biased curriculum.

A third approach to address racism within schools called "integrative anti-racism" is a framework coined by Canadian scholar George Sefa Dei. In integrative anti-racist education, the central goal is to problematize Euro-centric White male privilege, and the subsequent social inequalities in a pluralistic society (Dei, 1993). Similar to Ladson-Billings' culturally-relevant pedagogy, themes of decolonization, power, and critical consciousness run through Dei's vision

of an anti-racism approach within schools. Dei seeks to create a non-hierarchical framework through which we can use race as an access point to discuss the various oppressions that exist. Most notably, he extended a call for an Afro-centric curriculum and pedagogy to be employed in underserved parts of the Toronto District School Board. Dei applied Asante's (1987) idea of Afro-centricity, a methodology that is rooted in an African worldview and aims to unify the varying African perspectives for use in schools. Similar to Sleeter's (1996) vision for Ethnic Studies, an Afro-centric curriculum would address the issues of diversity in the teaching force, the absence of African narratives within the traditional school experience and develop a space for a discussion around systemic racism within the classroom. Dei argued that the current educational paradigm is not giving Black youth the intellectual and cultural capital necessary to challenge the dominant modes of learning and, subsequently, marginalizes them. This debate has brought up serious questions around the goals of public education, whose agenda is being served, and where our public tax dollars should go.

Although I agree with both Dei's and Sleeter's call for a program of studies that offer culturally relevant academic experiences to racialized people within a school setting, I worry these programs may further segregate racialized people from the dominant culture. I believe we need to find a way to integrate and weave rich and meaningful cross-cultural experiences into the current curricular context and offer them to everyone.

Finally, Kevin Kumashiro (2004) proposed his theory of anti-oppressive education in his work *Against Common Sense*. In this book, Kumashiro not only attempted to explicitly define terms such as "other" and "oppression" but also provided concrete examples of sample lessons that teachers can employ within their classrooms to teach through an anti-oppressive framework.

One of the most salient themes that runs through Kumashiro's (2004) work is his idea that anti-oppressive teaching and learning will require a level of emotional discomfort from students and teachers. Kumashiro problematized the ways teachers teach students to reaffirm their views of the world, and argued that, for teachers to teach in anti-oppressive ways, they must be willing to challenge their students to enter a state of "crisis." He defined crisis as: "a state of emotional discomfort and disorientation that calls on students to make some change" (p. 28). He posited that an educational practice without discomfort is unethical. I relate to these ideas on emotional discomfort with some ambivalence. On one hand, I do support the idea that it is a teacher's responsibility to challenge their students by placing them in uncomfortable situations. On the other hand, I believe this requires a level of attunement on behalf of the teacher to know what degree of emotional discomfort is appropriate for a given student at a given time. Would it be considered an ethical pedagogical practice to push a student into an emotional state that could induce conflict or crisis, or potentially the resurfacing of trauma? I believe these ethical concerns need to be considered by Kumashiro in the discussion of emotional crises which could be experienced by participants.

A second theme in Kumashiro's work is the idea of repetition, recognizing the comfort involved in teaching in ways that repeat the commonsensical ideas that are found within the dominant culture. He drew upon ideas found within Freudian psychology to explain that repetition often satiates the ego's desire for sameness and self-affirmation. To practice anti-oppressive pedagogy, for Kumashiro, means to actively challenge our individual desires as teachers to repeat the same harmful histories that have traditionally been cited. As an example, Kumashiro shared his own insights about becoming more open to new philosophical paradigms within Buddhism and other Eastern modalities as part of his ongoing commitment to challenge

the repetitive histories in his own life. As a scholar and practitioner, I can appreciate the honesty that Kumashiro offered by providing examples about how he is currently challenging himself to grow.

While Dei's idea of integrative anti-racism targeted policy developers and government, Kumashiro's ideas of anti-oppressive education focused on making pedagogical changes for teachers. His tangible examples of lesson plans for various anti-oppressive curriculum for classroom and teachers provided me with a roadmap on how to navigate these difficult conversations within my own classroom. While perhaps not as evidence-based and theory-focused as the ideas presented by Sleeter or Dei, Kumashiro's anti-oppressive pedagogy is the most accessible to the common teacher. As a researcher and a practitioner, I found Kumashiro's anti-oppressive pedagogy to be compelling on both a theoretical and practical level.

### **Racialized Teachers**

One major roadblock for teaching anti-racist education is cultivating a teaching force that is invested in teaching about the outcomes of equity, anti-oppression, and inclusion. It is assumed that this remains true within the independent school context as well. Sleeter (2001) reported research which suggests that an overwhelming White teaching force cannot meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population. Sleeter (2013) argued that the more racially homogenous the worldviews of the personnel in a school, the more homogenous the worldviews that are likely to be used to analyze teaching and student needs. Presumably, racialized teachers often have insights and knowledge about racism because of their own racialized realities (Kohli, 2009). For many scholars, racialized teachers present as school personnel is a great starting place

for cultivating interactions and learning experiences that embody the principles of anti-racist education that can serve the goals of equity and inclusions.

It is important to note that racialized teachers do not only add value for racialized students; they also add value to student populations that are predominantly White or culturally homogenous. Villegas and Clewall (1998) suggested that White children need to see racialized adults in professional settings as this teaches students that racialized people are equally suited to hold positions of power in society. The presence of racialized teachers in the classroom serves as a political message to students of all racialized identities. This message may be particularly important in many independent school settings in Canada given their predominantly homogeneous populations. However, many questions remain around how the school system can recruit and retain racialized teachers into a profession that has historically remained White.

Sleeter (2013) explained that there are two ways that university programs are currently addressing the lack of racialized teachers within their programs. The first strategy includes bringing racialized candidates into and through existing teacher education programs, while the second strategy includes tailoring programs to attract more racialized teacher candidates. The first strategy is structured around building support systems such as scholarships, academic support, and cultural support to combat issues of social isolation among racialized teacher candidates. The second strategy involves restructuring existing programs and curriculum to become more race conscious and culture conscious.

Nieto (2000) argued that when teacher education programs begin to take a stand on issues of social justice and diversity and make social justice a priority in their education programs, then programs naturally attract racialized candidates. She offered the suggestion that teacher



education programs should give preference to candidates that speak more than one language or offer courses that allow teacher candidates to receive credit for learning second languages. A policy like this would not only help in the recruitment of teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds, but it would also fill the existing gaps in meeting the needs of students of diverse backgrounds who would be better served within the education system.

Racialized candidates have been successfully recruited; the issues of retention remain an issue for many school boards. There are several factors that keep racialized people out of the profession. Andrew et al. (2019) examined the various environmental factors that push racialized teachers out of the workforce in the United States. In their study, researchers explored the various historical and contemporary features of teacher education programs and school boards that include such factors as high-stakes standardized exams, Euro-centric curriculum, and uninviting environments. Other scholars have noted the subtle forms of racism that make racialized people feel uninvited into White spaces as “racial microaggressions” (Huber & Solorzano, 2002). Racial micro-aggression in the classroom and workplace have a detrimental impact on the psychological and emotional well-being of racialized people in an educational setting and are, undoubtedly, contributing factors to issues of retention. Furthermore, repeated racial microaggressions could possibly psychologically alter the way racialized people see themselves, a phenomenon known as internalized racism (Kohli, 2008). I believe that the onus for creating a climate of acceptance within educational settings is a responsibility that is shared among people of all identities. School administrators and superintendents need to think more deeply about race and the ways we can make educational spaces more inclusive. Also, racialized people need to be willing to enter these spaces and disrupt microaggressions for sustainable change to occur.

There are several ways that racialized people can resist the pressures of assimilation within educational institutions. Endo (2019) interviewed two male racialized teachers who worked predominantly with White females and discovered that both participants felt a sense of pressure to assimilate and perform as “corrective representations,” or model minorities, for their culture (p. 462). To combat this, both participants actively embraced their bilingualism and actively spoke out against racism within their respective schools. As a result, both participants were able to form alliances with racialized families who felt alienated by the school system and acted as “cross cultural brokers” (p. 465) for their communities. Although this added responsibility of representing racialized communities to school administration may not be embraced by all racialized teachers, it certainly imbued a sense of pride in both teachers in this study. I imagine this choice to resist the pressures of assimilation by both these teachers set a strong example for many racialized students who, within predominantly White settings, are faced with similar choices every day.

All the issues around recruitment and retention of racialized teachers mentioned above are part of a larger discussion of power and space in education. Racialized teachers continue to feel disempowered in educational spaces designed in a manner that makes many feel unseen, unheard, and undervalued. Dei (2014) asked racialized teachers to take up a radical reclamation of space by asserting our voices to disrupt the status quo. He called for a removal of the systemic barriers to educational equity, in order to to give voice and space to the silenced and marginalized by including them in more positions of power. There may also be benefits for the participants of the study, who will, hopefully, experience an “arousal effect” (Brown & Tandom, 1978) that reorients their perceptions of the issues in their schools and empower them to act towards substantive changes. (Lather, 2003).

Dei (2014) reminded us that colonized bodies have now migrated to occupy stolen lands and are “complicit with European settlers in denying Indigenous people’s their sovereignty” (p. 244). Our inclusion in spaces that were historically unavailable to racialized peoples must be coupled with the responsibility to challenge forms of inequity that continue to plague other marginalized people. Fanon (1967) cautioned racialized peoples to avoid the allure of power that “colonial mimicry” (p. 112) can provide. For many racialized people, the validation that this inclusion can provide sometimes cultivates a sense of complacency that thwarts further efforts to decolonize spaces. In accessing more power, racialized teachers must be mindful of the greater picture and continue to fight for the liberation of those who may still be disempowered by the same spaces. Paradoxically, if we are not conscious of this responsibility, we may well reproduce the same inequities even through our inclusion.

### **Whiteness in Schools**

Since the passing of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* court ruling in 1954, the schooling system in America has legally been allowed to desegregate (Berry, 2015). While the laws have changed, and perhaps the diversity within classroom settings has changed, the culture of Whiteness and White supremacy remains entrenched in the education systems used in both the United States and Canada. Often, Whiteness operates silently in the classroom and is used as the invisible epistemological and ontological construct against which all others are compared (Berry, 2015). This section of my literature review will examine how a culture of Whiteness manifests in these educational spaces.

There are several factors that need to be considered in the examination of how Whiteness operates and continues to manifest itself in the institution of schools. Firstly, on an individual

level, those who possess Whiteness are complicit in maintaining it through silence and solidarity (Sleeter, 1996). Harris (1993) argued that, for many White people, the idea of Whiteness is entangled with property rights as they believe it is an asset that must be protected at all costs. She suggested that property can mean “things” beyond the physical and include personhood rights. The idea of Whiteness as an asset has many implications for anti-racist pedagogy and practice. I imagine that when confronted with anti-racist pedagogy, many White people would protect their Whiteness in similar ways to how they protect their property. To challenge the validity and ownership of this asset would be received as a violent attack worthy of retribution by many. This, for example, may provide one explanation for the visceral responses that many White people have to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Hackman and Raffo (2018) explained visceral responses to racial issues in their article entitled *More than Skin Deep*. They argued that the resistance to discussing or addressing institutional racism by Whites is rooted in intergenerational somatic trauma that is awakened through these conversations. Hackman and Raffo (2018) extend on the ground-breaking research of Peter Levine (2012) and Bessel van der Kolk’s (2006) work on trauma to suggest that White resistance to issues of racism stems from a frontal lobe experience that elicits a flight or fight survival response. This use of somatics as a dimension of how Whiteness maintains itself can be used to explain the tears, anger, and hypoactivity that results in classrooms, boardrooms, and at dinner tables where Whiteness is challenged. Although some may consider the word “trauma” too harsh of a word to describe the experiences of Whites, I believe using this language provides utility to those interested in examining these issues through a psychological lens. Using the word trauma helps shift the understanding of these issues beyond a historical narrative and into a dimension related to wounds buried within the psyche. Often in schools, we focus primarily on

building an awareness about the narratives around racism without simultaneously building an awareness on how to navigate these deeply held somatic emotions. The next evolution of anti-racism work will require teachers to have a toolkit in both navigating these visceral embodied experiences along with a historical narrative understanding of racism.

While Hackman and Raffo (2018) believed we need to start with the body, Maxwell (2004) argued that the starting point for White teachers should be naming; that is, naming the body as the colour White, and by acknowledging the White experience, we can begin to empathize with non-White people. While naming Whiteness for White students may be uncomfortable, if used correctly, it could be a practice that subverts the traditional “colour-blind” rhetoric often employed by conservative White people. Maxwell (2004) argued that teachers must lead by example and offer their class examples of how their race, class, gender privileges have given them unearned advantages in society. While I agree with Maxwell’s (2004) sentiments around naming, I believe that an attunement to the audience is important. This approach used indiscriminately would potentially alienate those White people who are ready for a deeper examination beyond their own identity labels.

Similarly, Sleeter (1996) noted that White people use a variety of strategies to maintain their distance from discussions of White supremacy and reinforce the racial hierarchy. One of the strategies mentioned was called “white racial bonding” (p. 145). Racial Bonding refers to the processes by which White people attempt to maintain racial solidarity by affirming a common-stance on race related issues (p. 149). Racial bonding is enacted from more explicit verbal exchanges that reinforce racial lines, to subtle jokes, eye contact, or coded words. In the context of schools, it is important to note that racial bonding can be enacted by teachers, students as well as systems. These gestures of White supremacy can also be considered a permutation of racial

micro-aggressions (Huber & Solorzano, 2002) that serve to remind BIPOC of their place in the socially constructed racial hierarchy.

To develop a greater awareness of White supremacy, Sleeter used the pedagogical tools of Critical Family History and Minority Position Perspectives. Both writing exercises ask students in positions of privilege to acknowledge how their unique access to power has played a role in their lives. In a Critical Family History exercise, pre-service teachers were asked to recount and analyze their own family narratives through the lens of power. Through the writing assignments, students developed a new understanding of the ways that many of their privileges came at the expense of marginalized populations. Similarly, in the group having Minority Position Perspectives, students were asked to inquire and research the answer to a question related to race, class, gender, and the like. Through guided instruction, students were able to move beyond their superficial understandings of these issues and began to understand the nuanced relationships of power and privilege. As both exercises were employed on pre-service teachers, I am curious about their efficacy on students at the middle school or high school level. Without a tremendous amount of scaffolding and education by the facilitator, these strategies may not be as effective in traditional classrooms.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge and address the ways White supremacy has an impact on the experiences of students and racialized teachers within the classroom. White supremacy often operates silently by locating Whiteness as the default. In a classroom, this may look like a superficial interest in the “other” that serves the White imagination and reinforces its colonial relationship to non-Whites. By locating Whiteness as “normal,” racialized students are made to feel like an accessory rather than an integral part of the classroom culture. hooks (1993) reminded us of the relationship between Whiteness and consumption of the other by observing:

“within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (pp. 21-22). In the classroom, this can look like multicultural potlucks or charity campaigns that act as poverty tourism in non-industrialized countries. These experiences promote White supremacy by providing White people with access to “spices” that they would not have access to without the consumption of the other. In the classroom, conservative multicultural rhetoric only benefits systems of White supremacy as it does nothing to dismantle the hierarchy of race and racism. Subsequently, it is important that any strategy that we use within our classrooms actively works to disrupt the racial hierarchy by dislocating Whiteness as normal. It is only through this theoretical framework that we can begin to build a foundation of an equitable and inclusive society within our independent schools and beyond.

### **Conceptual Framework**

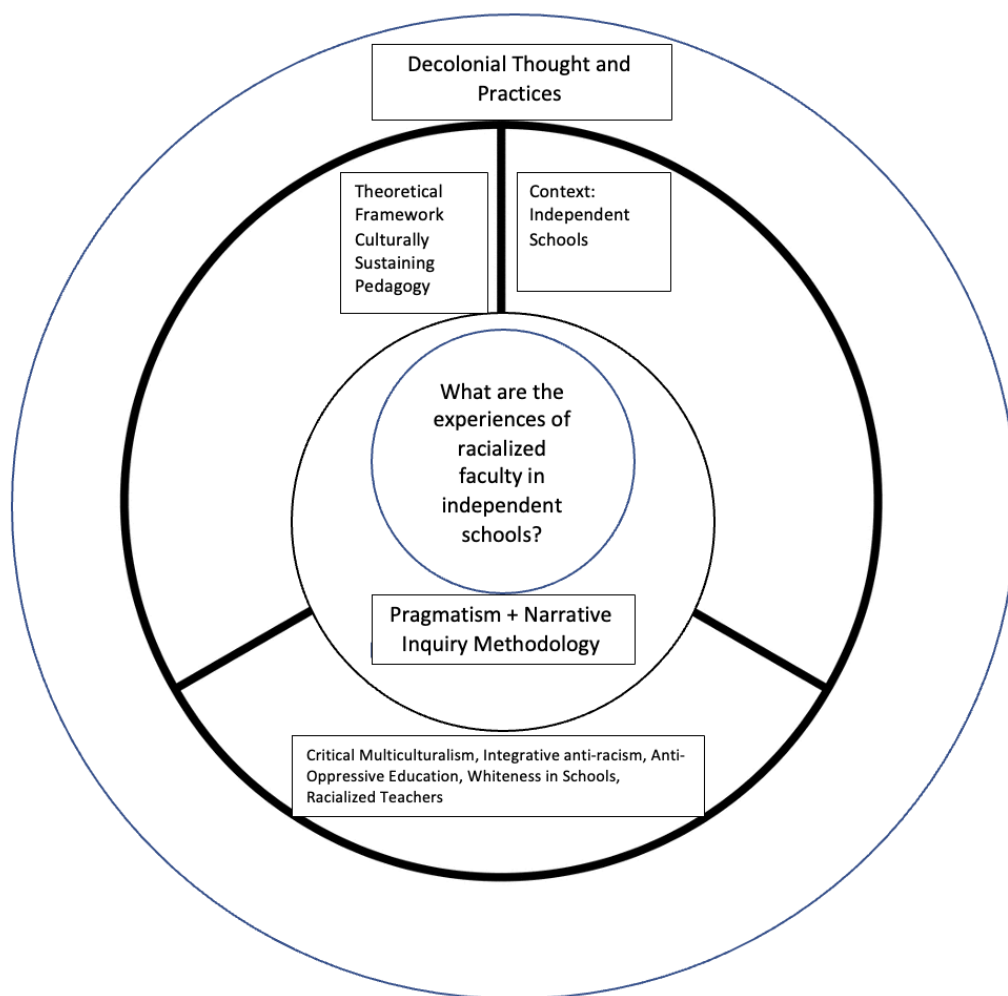
There are several important features of a conceptual framework that make it useful as a tool for our study. Although many use the terms conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and literature review interchangeably, Ravitch and Riggan (2017) argued that a conceptual framework is defined as an “argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous” (p. 5). Furthermore, they explain that a conceptual framework is a constructed superstructure using elements such as: personal interests and goals of the research, researcher’s positionality, literature review, topical research, and theoretical framework. While building a conceptual framework using these elements, it is important to keep in mind that one’s conceptual framework is emergent and ever evolving. As such, the conceptual framework that I am presenting here has gone through several iterations over time. I began the development of my conceptual framework by first creating a concept map as a way to visually diagram the various components of my conceptual framework (Ravitch &

Riggan, 2017). The creation of the concept map was an integral part of the process for the emergent conceptual framework.

After creating my concept map, I proceeded to amalgamate all the major concepts into a conceptual framework that encompasses the research questions, concepts, theories, and relevant literature. At the centre of my conceptual framework is the research question embedded in the methodology of narrative inquiry and a pragmatic worldview, as this is the lens through which the phenomenon being studied will be understood. Surrounding the question and methodology, you will find three components that helped me understand the research problem - the theoretical framework of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, the context of Independent Schools, and Other Pedagogical Approaches. Key elements integral to the research are considerations of Whiteness in Schools and Racialized Teachers. Finally, the three components are seen through the lens of decolonial thought and, as such, this foundational construct is found embedded in the outermost circle. Below, you will find a picture of this conceptual framework. See Figure 1.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework to the Experiences of Racialized Faculty within Independent School



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research designs are epistemologically and ontologically positioned amongst other research traditions with an orientation towards interpretive and social constructivist notions of reality. In these traditions, reality is understood as something that is socially constructed, which means that there is no single, observable reality (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) further explains that in this worldview, meanings are variable, multiple, and complex, which leads researchers to construct meanings with consideration to social, historical, and interpersonal relations. While both critical and postmodern research fall under qualitative research traditions, the research approach in each differs. While critical research traditions move beyond interpretive stances on reality and seek to critique power and oppression, post-modernist seek to celebrate the diversity amongst people, ideas, and institutions by dismantling the grand narratives that govern our ideas of truth (Merriam, 2009).

There are four main characteristics identified as defining features of qualitative research: focus on process, understanding, and developing meaning. While the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). Firstly, by focusing on meaning and understanding, qualitative researchers are discovering how participants make sense of their lives rather than on the product or outcome of the research. Secondly, as an extension on this approach, since understanding is the primary goal of qualitative forms of research, the human is the primary instrument and has agency. During the research process, the human researcher engages with participants and can process verbal and non-verbal communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy

of information, and explore unanticipated responses. Thirdly, rather than deductively testing concepts, hypotheses and theories, to make sense of data, qualitative research is oriented towards first gathering data and then inductively building concepts, hypotheses, and theories. Finally, qualitative data uses words to describe what has been learned from the data rather than numbers. Data can take the form of field notes, interviews, quotes, excerpts from videotapes and the like. Many of these features can be found throughout this study, as well as several other less commonly occurring traits of qualitative research such as: a flexible and emergent design, smaller non-random sampling for participants, and the researcher spending a great deal of time in the natural setting alongside participants (Merriam, 2009)

### **Pragmatism**

As a researcher, I have aligned myself with the worldview of the pragmatists. This ontological and epistemological choice has had several practical consequences on how this study has been conducted and how the results were analyzed. Particularly, I am compelled by the agenda of pragmatism that prioritizes the unity of knowledge, action, and values rather than the attempt to find meaning through a metaphysical search (Pavlis & Gkiosos, 2017). Pragmatists believe that reality is co-constructed through a process of socially shared inquiry that leads us to knowledge or truth (Garrison, 1994).

Dewey argued against the Cartesian dualist notions of mind and matter. Dewey argued against separating mind and matter, subject and object, where knowing becomes a process that occurs separate from the environment. Rather, Dewey believed that we should and could keep mind and matter together and not separate from each other. He offered a transactional approach to our understanding of mind and matter, in which both are in dynamic relationship with each

other. To understand the implications of this understanding for the shaping of this study, it is important to first examine Dewey's notion of experience.

Dewey used the word “experience” to refer to the transactions of living organisms with their environment (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). For Dewey, this understanding intimately related humans with their environment and nature. Dewey (1925) explains that experience, “is a means of penetrating continually further into the heart of nature” (p. 5). What made the human experience different than that of an animal was, according to Dewey, cultural influences on our perceptions of reality.

According to Dewey, there are many modes of experience. Knowing is the cognitive domain of experience (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). He believed that we did not need to depend on knowledge to understand a faithful concept of reality because “the world as we experience it is the real world” (p. 235, Dewey, 1925). While he argued that all modes of experiencing the world were equally real, it is important to note that Dewey believed that the cognitive domain was the only form of experience that could support action. Biesta and Burbules (2003) explain that, for Dewey, knowing allows us to intelligently plan and direct our actions and consequences.

To move from experience to knowledge, Dewey believed that we must “discover the conditions and consequences” involved in what was happening (p. 84, 1998). In his theory of knowledge, Dewey is not as much concerned with reality as with the relationship between actions and their consequences. Dewey claimed that to obtain knowledge, we needed action and reflection in tandem. This means that “knowing” as Dewey understood it, was something actionable, and not something that happened deep within the mind (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). A Deweyan pragmatic approach to viewing experience means to honour the complexities of people’s lives shaped by contexts, times, and relationships within which they are enfolded

(Clandinin, 2000). Each narrative in this inquiry reaches backwards and forwards, “over time and over multiple generations, and over multiple places, and relationships” (p. 19). It is important to note that “relationship” used in this context does not simply refer to person to person relationships, but rather, refers to the ways in which knowledge and “knower” are deeply contextually and temporally intertwined.

Dewey believed that reality should be understood in temporal terms as reality was ever evolving. He believed that both mind and matter, subject, and object, are both in a dynamic relation with each other. Furthermore, the idea of truth was not related to creating a static description of reality, rather, it is about creating a functional relationship between subject and object, actions, and consequences, that is temporally and context dependent.

Dewey posited that an experience has two main components: continuity and interaction. Continuity refers to the idea that experience grows out of experiences and lead to other new experiences (Clandinin, 2006). In the process of this inquiry, in understanding the experiences of the participants, it was important to not only consider the historical context, but also the possibilities that the current experience may have an impact on future experiences. Interaction, according to Deweyan pragmatism, referred to the idea that people cannot be examined only as individuals. They must also be considered in their social context. Dewey suggested that a person’s internal landscape is in constant interplay with its environment and to fully understand experience, one must pay close attention to these internal conditions. The principle of continuity and interaction refines our understanding of experience and allows for deeper contemplation of conditions during our investigation. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in the experiences of racialized educators within the independent school system. When I use the word

experience in this study, I am referring to the ways or experiences by which racialized educators have been changed resulting from their relationships with the independent school system.

Deweyan Pragmatism had a direct influence on the conception of this educational research and also, on the ways I have understood the consequences of this study. Dewey argued that there was a functional relationship between natural inquiry and social inquiry. He did not believe that scientific inquiry and social inquiry were separate endeavors. Furthermore, the objects of science were not more real than those found in inquiry arising within the social sciences. Rather, Dewey believed that intelligent action and planned inquiry in the social domain could lead us to greater worldly intelligence. He wanted to see the social sciences move away from a mechanistic and technical approach taken by the natural sciences and develop an equal relationship between social and natural sciences. This approach places the solving of problems and experimental inquiry at the center of research, thus championing the needs and suffering of the human. Deweyan Pragmatism is action and consequence driven. It appeals to those researchers that are more interested in the practical applications than theoretical inconsistencies. The end goal of this study, and that generally held by all pragmatists, is to create vocabularies and descriptions that are useful in criticizing, developing, and improving educational practices. This study aims to offer insights towards creating tools to solve practical pedagogical, curricular, and policy-based problems regarding school equity in independent schools.

While many would argue that pragmatism places a heavy focus on the practical applications and the technical side within a study, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) firmly contend that pragmatism is rooted in the idea that our choices have practical consequences on the unfolding of our lives. Furthermore, relational ontology informs the understanding that knowledge and experience are intertwined and we, as researchers, are accountable for the

experiences that result from the research we conduct. This view of experience lends itself to a need for an awareness of a relational ethic and the attendant practical consequences which are active in the making and unfolding of both my own and the participant's lives. Furthermore, some would argue that pragmatism has limited utility for those wishing to fight for power for marginalized groups (Frega, 2013). I argue that pragmatism avoids many of the pitfalls of Critical Theory by not subscribing to any meta-narrative that pathologizes modern society (Frega, 2013). Rather, pragmatism advocates for sustained critique without making criticism as the end goal of its worldview. Of all the things that pragmatism offers this study, the most influential perspective to me and the approach of this study, is the idea it offers concerning the principle of a positive problem-solving approach basis for inquiry that carries with it a great potential for life in a democratic society (Ray, 2004). Using a pragmatic approach for this study ensures that the chosen means are consistent with the desired ends.

### **Design Overview**

Through a narrative inquiry methodology, I studied the experiences of racialized peoples within independent school settings. Six one-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the three teachers working within independent schools. Through the collaboration of each participant, the interviews were converted to interim research texts. Through member checking and peer debriefing, the interim research texts underwent a series of revisions until both researcher and participant could agree on a final narrative research text. Relational ethics were used throughout the data collection and analysis phases to fully honour the participants involved in the study. The following paragraphs will elucidate the specific details of the aforementioned elements of this inquiry.

## Narrative Inquiry

One method used to study experience that aligns with Deweyan pragmatism is narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2013) argued that experience itself is an embodied narrative life composition: “thinking narratively about a phenomenon – that is, about people’s experiences, is key to undertaking narrative inquiries” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) positioned narrative inquiry as a quintessential Deweyan pragmatic methodology. This bold approach to understanding experience challenges the previously held belief of experience as something that cannot be studied.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) built on Deweyan understanding of experience by imagining a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework to describe experience. This framework places temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along the third dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). They also expanded on their understanding of inquiry by saying that to truly understand an experience, one must ask questions that seek to understand the positionality of the experience on this continuum. The ideas found in this three-dimensional framework directly align with, and extend, the idea found within Deweyan notions of experience. The deeply woven interrelationship between pragmatic philosophy and narrative inquiry makes it a suitable methodological framework for this inquiry.

It is important to note that narrative inquiry, as imagined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), suggested that personal conditions are as equally important as social conditions in the understanding of experience. This important distinction positions narrative inquiry differently than methodologies rooted in critical traditions which focus on the dynamics of power, hegemony, and social structures within experience (Hutchison, 2015). This study is grounded in



the idea that a robust understanding of experience should include an examination of both the inner landscape of the individual along with the social milieus that influence the experience.

Narrative inquiry, necessitates that inquirers begin with situating themselves in the research through locating their personal, practical, and social justifications. Clandinin (2013) explained that this step is necessary to understand who we see ourselves being and becoming in the inquiry. Furthermore, locating oneself in the research puzzle allows for a clearer understanding of why we are entering into relationships with participants. This lends itself to a greater intentionality as we begin to live alongside our participants. Clandinin (2013) also posited that personal justifications are not enough. Narrative inquirers also need practical and social justifications before entering a research puzzle. Practical justifications attend to the desire for narrative inquirers to make visible the lives of the participants in the research. This ties into social justifications, as we hope a deeper understanding of the participant's lives informs material changes within systems where they live. Social justifications may lead to social action and policy changes.

According to Clandinin (2013) using a narrative inquiry to study experiences requires that narrative inquirers view experiences as an embodied narrative life composition. Subsequently, this means that narrative inquirers are always in interaction and collaboration with participants over time, in the context of places, in relation to social interactions with milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). These are the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry that must be considered when understanding the unfolding narrative of a participant. The three commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place embedded within narrative inquiry separate it from other methodologies. Temporality attends to the entanglements of past, present, and future within the events being studied. Carr (1986) explained how, "we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along" (p. 76). As such, it is important for narrative

inquirers to consider the ways in which temporality shapes the unfolding of a particular narrative. Secondly, narrative inquirers must also attend to the personal and social conditions that influence the events under study. This will include such things as the larger cultural, social, institutional, familial narratives in addition to the social interactions between the participant and the researcher. Lastly, narrative inquirers must attend to the dimension of place within their study. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) defined place as “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). Narrative inquirers must consider the ways that the land and geographical location of the research influence the study. During the study, researchers must always be mindful of the ways that these three commonplaces within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework influence the unfolding of the narratives being studied.

Narrative inquiry uses different terminology with respect to research questions, data, and ethics. These differences attend to the relational commitments of the methodology. Research questions are framed as research puzzles. The concept of reframing a question as a research puzzle allows for researchers to compose each narrative around a wonder instead of searching for a particular answer. Research puzzles allow more room for exploration, searching, re-searching, and searching again (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Working through ‘research puzzles’ enables narrative inquiry to honor the intricacies and complexities of living alongside participants. As well, narrative inquiry reframes traditional notions of data into field texts. Field texts are the records, including such things as: field notes, transcripts of conversations, artifacts, photographs, and writing by participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) began to use the term field texts instead of the word data to capture the experiential, intersubjective nature of information being collected. Field texts allow narrative inquirers to see how others make meaning from experiences and direct us towards more diverse possibilities in how we tell and

retell stories. It is important to note the ways that narrative inquiry differs on the topic of ethics from traditional research methodologies. Whereas research ethical requirements can begin and end with ethics boards in traditional research, narrative inquiry is an inherently gradual and slow methodology that attends to ethics throughout the study. I will address more at length about the relational ethics of narrative inquiry in the next sections.

Lastly, there is a marked quality of incompleteness that runs through narrative inquiry. The knowledge produced from narrative inquiry leads less to generalizations and certainties (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). Conversely, the knowledge that is co-constructed from narrative inquiry is oriented towards imagining alternative possibilities (Bateson, 2000). Since narrative inquirers use research puzzles, final research texts do not have final answers; the puzzle is not finite. Rather, the final research texts are intended to, “engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others” (p. 51, Clandinin, 2013).

### **Relational Ethics**

Clandinin, Caine, and Lesard (2018) explained that relational ethics live at the heart of narrative inquiry in that they direct us to see ethical action as situated within and central to relationships with participants. This idea speaks to the ways humans relate to each other and to themselves through narratives. Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves and each other are more essential to our nourishment than the food we consume (Lopez, 1990). Stories play a fundamental role in the meaning-making of our everyday lives for both those that share and those that receive. There is a transformative act in the sharing and receiving of stories, and as such, there is an inherent responsibility. The relational responsibility is embedded in both the present moment as well as the future. Relational ethics moves beyond the confines of a

methodology while remaining central to the methodology. Relational ethics remain central to this study as it must be acknowledged that narrative can, and has historically, been used to silence, diminish, and even limit the possibilities for people (Meretoja, 2017). Meretoja (2017) explains narrative is a powerful tool that can be used to give voice and empower, as well as, silence and disempower individuals. Relational ethics, as used in this narrative inquiry, “strives towards dialogical practices of telling, sharing, and reinterpreting stories in ways that help us look at the world from the perspective of difference and reinvent it - and our lives - as both individuals and communities” (p. 172, Meretoja, 2017). Moving through this inquiry, I was cognizant of the historical narratives that have been imposed on racialized peoples to limit and contract the possibilities for them within education and the world at large. By giving voice to racialized educators, this study hopes to add to the capacity for further storytelling and creating conditions of empowerment for minoritized individuals (Meretoja, 2017). Furthermore, this study hopes to disrupt the broader cultural narratives that have been used to perpetuate legacies of trauma on racialized peoples.

Narrative inquiry is grounded in the idea that human’s lives not only unfold in relation with each other but also in relation to social, cultural and institutional narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As researchers practicing narrative inquiry, we are continuously engaging in an active and dynamic relationship with the participants in our study. Additionally, as we study the unfolding narratives of our participants, we and our life’s narratives are shifted, too. This highlights the importance of what Clandinin, Caine, and Lesard (2018) name as “methodological reflexivity”. In this study, the back and forth process that is embedded into the methodology allows for reflexivity, in that the researcher is constantly evaluating and assessing the narrative that is unfolding between the participant and themselves.

### Five Interrelated Considerations

Clandinin, Caine, and Lesard (2018) highlight five interrelated considerations in the relational ethics of narrative inquiry: the necessity of engaging with imagination/improvisation and playfulness, the necessity of moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living, the necessity of living with ethical understandings as always in process, the necessity of always engaging with a sense of uncertainty in liminal spaces that positions us in places of disease, and the necessity to understand that ethical relations are always lived embodiments that ask us to be still and listen with silence and contemplation. Furthermore, building safe and caring relationships requires time and patience. If researchers move too quickly, not only will we be inattentive to the stories being shared, we will also be precluding the building of relationships. Moving slowly allows us to sustain and honour the ways the participants and the research want to live.

To live in a relationally ethical way, one must be attentive to the emergent quality of the interactions and rely on improvisation and intuition to guide the interactions. Often ‘research’ in the formal sense, is devoid of the creativity and imagination necessary to dwell in the unknowing and emergent. While adhering to rigid protocols and research norms, the researcher may end up receiving controlled and canned responses that do not accurately reflect the mystery of the unfolding of the lives we are trying to understand. Bateson (2000) talked about improvisation in order to invent or make something at the time when it is needed without already having planned it. This openness to improving requires a willingness, on behalf of the researcher, to set aside their research plans and commit to any emergent unfolding. An example of this emergent unfolding during this research was the use of semi-structured interviews. The questions chosen to begin the first interview were modified and adjusted moving into the second interview in

response to the context and participant. Often this process is accompanied with discomfort and dis/ease as we step into the liminal relational spaces. To sit with the discomfort of hearing a story that challenges your narrative of what is happening is a difficult task that requires patience and slowness. It also requires a willingness to be flexible and adapt to the circumstances.

Furthermore, there may be ethical considerations in specific contexts, such as informed consent, that preclude the researcher from world-travelling into a participant's life. Researchers are often beholden to ethical boards that require parent permission to visit participants outside the scope of the designated places of research. This research allowed the emergent to unfold by creating relational safety through prolonged engagement with the participants. We also used semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility during the interview process.

### **Wakefulness**

Narrative inquiry encourages a “wakefulness” not only to one’s own life, but also to the life of the participant. The idea of wakefulness is used as an extension of the idea of “wide-awakeness” coined by Greene (1995). Greene (1995) explained that “without the ability to think about yourself, to reflect on your life, there is really no awareness, no consciousness.

Consciousness doesn’t come automatically, it comes through being alive, awake, curious and often furious “ (p. 35). While Greene’s idea that “wide-awakeness” is an “awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p. 35). While Greene’s idea that wide-awakeness is an “awareness of what it is to be in the world” suggests there is only one world, narrative inquirers realise that there may be multiple worlds that are inhabited. This idea is an extension of what Lugones (1987) described as world-traveling. She writes, “those of us who are ‘world-travellers’ have the distinct experience of being different in different worlds and having the capacity to remember other worlds and ourselves in them” (p. 8). World-traveling for narrative inquirers requires an

attunement to the co-constructed relational field, and to how we construct ourselves and each other in these different worlds. Narrative inquiry necessitates wakefulness, world-traveling, and loving perception as part of a relational ethic.

In Green's view, effective wakefulness would allow one to see the ways in which dominant narratives shape the unfolding of one's own narrative or the participants' narratives (1995). Perhaps, a researcher will be reliving and imposing childhood narratives on the stories that are currently being lived. Furthermore, effective wakefulness requires a slow pace that allows researchers to attend carefully to the experiences of the participants. Without a slow pace, narrative inquirers fall into the trap of using dominant narratives and assumptions to make meaning of the experiences of the participants. An element of wakefulness was required for the duration of this study to ensure that diversity of opinion was embraced, and the inquiry did not become self-indulgent.

### **Challenges in Relational Ethics**

Clandinin, Caine, and Lesard (2018) discussed the importance of asking themselves the question, "Who are we in this research? And Who am I in relation to the life making of the participants?". These questions challenge the dominant narrative that researchers hold that the ethical commitments are complete after the end of the study. Based on the insights from their research, while the weekly commitments to meet with students had ended, the unfolding of the storied lives, in which the researchers had become a character, would continue beyond the confines of the study. Perhaps, the institutional stories that were downloaded previous to the study have been changed as a result of the co-created stories that were unfolding alongside the researcher. We let certain stories loose in the world in hopes that living in storied relationships can disrupt old stories and create new ones. In this study, the relationship that was formed

between the researcher and each participant continued through text messages and social media after the creation of final research texts. Although frequency and volume of contact between myself and the participant declined following the study, there was an established trust and rapport that was maintained through social media contact in the form of “likes” and “comments” on personal posts.

Clandinin, Caine, and Lesard (2018) also discussed the challenges in embodying the different dimensions of relational ethics. The challenge that presents itself with living through playfulness and world-travelling is that these things are difficult to embody when we are caught up in our stories about what is happening. Without self-facing wakefulness, we often reproduce stories that have been passed down unconsciously from institutions and culture. There is also a strong desire for many people to turn away from the dis/ease that emerges from world-traveling. To sit with the discomfort of hearing a story that challenges your narrative is a difficult task that requires patience and slowness. Furthermore, there may be ethical considerations in place, such as informed consent, that prohibit the researcher from traveling into a participant's life. Researchers are often beholden to ethical boards that require parent permission to visit participants outside the scope of the designated places of research.

Secondly, moving slowly in relational ethics requires both the participant and researcher to be mindful of their proclivities to move fast and gloss over what is emergent. It is only through the slowness that we can become attentive and aware of embodied stories that we and our participants are living. This slowness was embodied into the interviews through intentional pausing and creation of space for the participant. The pauses were often full of emotional content for myself and the participant. Through these pauses, I was able to intentionally direct or redirect attention to the emergent content that was arising in the co-created space. Once again, there was



times of ethical distress that required us to sit with dis/ease and discomfort. Moving fast and turning away is often a response that stems from an avoidance of discomfort. Through a mutual turning towards emotional discomfort, we were able to move through the emotional content together and deepen our trust and relational intimacy.

The challenges of staying wakeful have to do with the number of competing stories that are in constant tension with each other as we live alongside study participants. There are inherent complexities and nuances that are made visible through living alongside participants. Place and context can make one really awake to the ways that one is storied by others.

To live in relation with people is a daunting endeavour. It requires loving perception, patience, slowness, wakefulness, world-traveling, and reflexivity. Perhaps, our world does not condition us to live in a relational ethical way. We are programmed from an early age to move fast, control outcomes, and know the direction we are traveling. To live in an ethical relationship with people requires a shift in consciousness towards fully honoring our responsibilities to the co-created relational field between people and places that our own stories are unfolding alongside.

It is not enough to consider ethics at the advent of research using a methodology that centers relationality in the way that narrative inquiry does. Of course, I went through formal university ethics research board approval before beginning any of the interviews. However, as narrative inquiry involves a greater participatory dynamic, ethics were embedded into every interaction of the inquiry. One of the major ethical considerations is that of informed consent. Negotiating consent from the onset of the research did not suffice as informed consent in this study. The participants and I continually communicated our feelings around the co-constructed narrative by way of examining the interim field texts before research texts were written. Furthermore, I made it clear that the participants were welcome to terminate their participation in

the study at any point during the process. These terms were made explicit before the onset of this study by way of a waiver. This process of constant negotiation involved a level of vulnerability, openness, reciprocity, and care on behalf of all parties involved (Clandinin, 2013). Questions about how the participants were represented, anonymizing information, and other possible details were considered throughout the research process. My primary audience remained the participants, “for it is to them that we owe our care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories that sustain them.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.173).

Regarding questions of anonymizing data, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded us that what once was fixed, may change throughout the process of the inquiry. Participants who once did not want to be named may change their mind during the process of the research and vice versa. Participants may want credit for a narrative that they see themselves as co-authors. These are considerations that I took into account during the inquiry. Using a relational approach to this research allowed for constant negotiation of the terms of the study. Given that the subject matter of this study potentially dealt with issues of discrimination, marginalization, and institutional racism, I made the offer of anonymity to all participants from the onset. Furthermore, the anonymization of the schools, and of names of colleagues and students was maintained throughout the study.

One of the many risks in conducting a narrative inquiry is the dangers of composing a narrative that is narcissistic and solipsistic. To avoid this common pitfall, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) invited narrative inquirers to listen carefully to critics as, “each response is valid to some degree and contains the seed of an important point” (p.181).

Finally, there were many ethical issues that could have arisen as a result of conducting interviews through a relational framework. Josselson (2013) reminded narrative inquirers that they “have a special responsibility to receive what you have been given without tampering with

it” (p.103). In essence, we are asked to handle our relational dialogues with an ethic of care that involves only documenting the participants' self-understanding while withholding our own interpretations until the analysis phase. Similarly, the researcher must be attuned to the emotional temperature of the interview and gauge the response of the participants. There will be times when a seemingly innocuous question may unearth a charged response from participants. In these moments, it was important for the researcher to offer compassion and acknowledge the pain; but not help participants process the pain that surfaces. This is a major difference between interviewing and therapy. Josselson (2013) asserted that when these emotions come up, the researcher must allow participants to maintain narrative control over their story and it is the job of the researcher to redirect the interview in a manner that allows for this. Throughout the study, many of the questions touched upon subject matter that caused momentary emotional dysregulation. It was in these times that I, as the interviewer, had to be attuned to the needs of the participant. In some cases, I allowed for time and space for the participant to self-regulate their emotions before moving on. Other times, I had to re-direct the interview away from emotional discomfort. My response was contingent on the context and the participant.

Ultimately, the ethical backbone of this study was a commitment to cultivating an honest, open, and trusting relationship between participant and researcher. Each ethical concern was an ongoing negotiation between all the parties involved. For instance, the ethical concerns were considered throughout the writing of the interim and final research texts. I and the participants had to negotiate and consider how much detail to offer the audience while maintaining their anonymity. Anonymity, ownership, and informed consent are some of the issues that I addressed continually throughout the study. Ethics was woven into the fabric of a narrative inquiry methodology, for one cannot tell an authentic story without a commitment to cultivating an honest and caring relationship with those involved.

## **Sampling/Recruitment**

I recruited participants for this study using purposeful homogeneous sampling. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explained that purposeful sampling is used when researchers want to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand a central phenomenon. Furthermore, purposeful sampling is often used to handpick individuals for a study in hopes of giving them voice through the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 207). As this study hoped to give voice to underrepresented and historically excluded individuals in the private school system, purposeful sampling is justified. Homogeneous sampling is appropriate when researchers are interested in exploring individual membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In this study, the subgroup of interest was racialized minority teachers within independent schools.

The sample size for a narrative inquiry can range from a single individual to ten individuals (Wells, 2011). A soft baseline of three individuals was used for recruitment, based on restrictions due to time limitations and COVID protocols. I used social media platforms of Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to recruit these participants as my criteria for selection was very specific and finding eager and willing participants was proving to be difficult. Two of the participants responded to my social media post and one participant was external to my network.

## **Data Collection**

Clandinin (2013) explained that, before a narrative researcher meets a participant or begins collecting data, they should locate themselves within the “research puzzle” (p. 42) they are wishing to study. This means that researchers should comprehensively understand the personal, practical, and social justifications of their inquiry. It is recommended that researchers locate themselves in the phenomena by creating an autobiographical narrative inquiry. Without a

deep understanding of the relationship of the researcher to the research puzzle being studied, the relational work that is involved in collecting data will not occur. Writing an autobiography must be the starting point of any narrative inquiry. This autobiographical text was written as a three-page personal journal entry before the beginning of the data collection phase and included a personal history of my relationship with schooling from Kindergarten to my current professional experience in independent schools.

Once the autobiography of the researcher has been written, narrative inquirers have two possibilities as to where they can begin their inquiry: listening to individuals tell their stories or living alongside participants as they live and tell their stories (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). For the purposes of this study, I began my inquiry by living alongside the chosen participants. This required me to go to where the participants take me – their homes, their workplaces, to their families. Since there were COVID-19 restrictions interfering with taking me into participants' homes, I restricted this process to meeting participants virtually and in socially distanced settings, rather than in person. Regardless of how and where I met with participants, the process of building relational intimacy required for narrative inquiry study was established from the beginning of the study. During this phase, preliminary phone calls took place with participants to offer informal introductions, answer questions, and provide more information about how the study would proceed. Through the enactment of this step, I could feel the relational intimacy and trust being built between myself and the participant. The participants and I continued contact via text messaging as we set a date for our first interview.

The next step of the data collection process included collecting a variety of field texts from both the participant and the researcher, which will be explained in the next section. It is important to note that field texts are co-composed by researcher and participant to reflect the intersubjective nature of experience unfolding between both individuals through the narrative

inquiry research process. The goal of the field text is to capture the various tensions, complexities, and nuances that are embedded in an unfolding of the lives involved in the inquiry. A variety of field texts were used to study the experience of the participants.

### **Instruments**

In Narrative Inquiry, the data collected to represent the experience of the researcher and participants are called field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). Clandinin explained that field texts are not constructed with interpretive intent as they represent a text closest to the experience of the participant. In this study, I used a combination of autobiographical writing, reflexive journaling and semi-structured interviews to fully understand the experiences of racialized teachers in independent school settings as field texts. It is important to note that the collection of the field texts did not only serve as data to be examined, but also as an archival reference of the relational intimacy necessary to conduct narrative inquiry effectively. Each field text was positioned with the feedback of participants to ensure that all parties agreed on the knowledge claims and meaning being derived from the stories.

To circumvent the power dynamics embedded in traditional structured interviews, this study used semi-structured interviews, defined by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with a view to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena. Two interpretive semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. I used a specific type of semi-structured interview called the oral history interview in which participants were asked to share their stories alongside details of intentions and motives (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Oral history interviews have the potential for a more equitable and collaborative dynamic between interviewer and interviewee (Grele, 1985). Given the relational ethic that narrative inquiry espouses, oral history

interpretive semi-structured interview aligns best with this study. Although there were pre-determined questions for my semi-structured interviews, I was not constrained by the interview questions. There was an iterative process that allowed me to change questions between the first and second interviews and cater to the needs of the participants. The questions were internally tested with the guidance of my supervisor to ensure the cogency of the questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). My supervisor offered insights and feedback into the order, syntax, language, and the content of the questions. A transcript of the semi-structured interview was generated using an auto transcription function during the one hour interviews. The transcript was corrected and verified through a relistening of the interview and also served as a field text.

The first interviews for all three participants were collected within the time frame of one month, and then a second set of interviews were collected approximately six weeks apart from the first interviews for each participant. Interim research texts were created before the second interview to receive direct feedback from the participant. The interim research texts were created with the consideration of the face-to-face feedback received before the second interview. This step ensured that I was honouring their time and their investment in the study by considering efficiency.

There was no hierarchy in collecting or interpreting field texts. Each field text served as an important puzzle piece in understanding the complete experiences of racialized faculty within independent school settings. Equally important to note is the relational intimacy required in collecting field texts. There must be a baseline relationship between researcher and participant before field texts can be collected via semi-structured interviews. A fine attunement to the emotional state and people within the framework of the research was necessary to collect data in a humane and ethical manner. Sypher et al. (2009) reminded us that sensitive interviewers can use their understanding of psychology along with verbal and non-verbal cues to gain a

comprehensive understanding of the meanings important to the participant during an interview. When emotional content became present, I allowed space for the participant to decide whether they wanted to lean into the content or turn away. My primary concern was the well-being of the participant.

### **Data Analysis and Processing**

Once the field texts along with the feedback from the participants were gathered, then I created interim research texts. This process involved a shift away from the intensive interactions between participant and researcher and a movement towards spending more time with the field texts. By drafting interim research texts, narrative inquirers can continue to solicit feedback from participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation and maintain relationality with participants. This was an iterative process that involved negotiation between participant and researcher. I found that I had to go back to the field to collect more field text in order to understand the unfolding narrative more fully on a few occasions. Clandinin (2013) has identified the inherent messiness of understanding experience through narrative inquiry, explaining that:

the composing, co-composing, and negotiation of interim and final research texts, makes visible the multiplicity, as well as the narrative coherence and lack of coherence of our lives, the lives of the participants, and the lives we co-compose in the midst of our narrative inquiries. (p. 49)

Narrative inquirers must be aware of this desire to seek coherence when, perhaps, there may not be any.

In the context of this research study, I drafted interim research texts from field texts and offered a chance for all the participants to provide feedback throughout. I did this by having copies of texts available for both myself and participants during the co-construction of field texts. As I read the interim texts out loud, participants used a writing utensil to offer feedback or



ask me to pause when they wanted to further process an idea. I was making notes and adding to interim research texts during this process. I also made notes of pauses, tensions, or conflicts that arose during the reading of the texts. Soliciting feedback on interim research texts served the purpose of capturing the voice of participants and checking accuracy of documented details.

After creating interim research texts, I moved towards creating final research texts. During the process of creating interim and final research texts, it was important to remember that I continued to live within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. That is, each text was positioned, read, re-read, and reviewed and considered through the context of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013). Every week, I embedded time into my schedule to position each interim field text into the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Furthermore, initial analysis of each interim research text dealt with matters such as character, place, plot, tensions, end point, tone and context. However, it was responses related to the research questions that shaped the interpretation and analysis of interview narratives. Negotiation of each of these elements listed above and their subsequent meanings occurred alongside the participants during the analysis phase. As such, this process was non-linear and cannot be boiled down into steps. “Plotlines are continually revised as consultations take place over written materials, and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story” (p. 132, Clandinin, 2000). I embraced the uncertainty, ambiguity, and doubt that is part of the transition from interim research text to research text (Clandinin, 2013).

Reconceptualizing how data and research is collected is central to the success of writing a narrative inquiry. This involved a process of revisiting and revising that Clandinin (2013) called, “back and forth” (p. 167). The fluid action of “back and forth” continues until the narrative takes a form that fully captures the voice of audience, researcher, and participant. Once fully constructed, the final research texts were positioned within theories and streams of thought that

engage conversations around racialized peoples within independent schools. This provided social significance to the research texts that we created.

Oral history interviews, much like other forms of interviews, rely heavily on self-reporting when participants may be asked to recall details, thoughts, behaviors, and feelings from many years ago. For most narrative inquirers, there is less of an interest in the accuracy of the events being shared and more of a focus on the meaning derived from the events being described during the interviews (Sypher et al., 2009)

Finally, it was important for me to use member-checking as an additional measure to ensure authenticity of the narratives produced by the field notes. Without these relational checks and balances between researcher and participant, and between the researcher and the community, the narrative inquiry ran the risk of becoming a self-indulgent literary work with little research value. Crites (1986) described good narrative writing as stories that offer an “invitation” to the reader to participate in the inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) wrote that it is incumbent on the researcher to assess the quality of the narrative as logically sound by inviting other researchers to read and interact with the produced text. I embedded frequent member-checking throughout the duration of the study with participants and other researchers to ensure the internal validity of the data being collected. Member-checking was used by offering interim research texts to elicit feedback from the participants and my supervisor before the final research texts were created. This ensured that the re-storying of the field texts was vetted by multiple sources, and most importantly was vetted by the participants themselves. Byrne (2001) explained that prolonged engagement enhances credibility of the collected data by ensuring that the researcher has spent sufficient time with the participants. Between initial contact and when the final research texts were created, I had spent a total of 5 months communicating with the participants. Engagement between participants and myself took the form of emails, voice messages, text

messages, phone calls, and our two scheduled interviews. Prolonged engagement through face to face contact was, of course, limited by COVID circumstances. but virtual mediums allowed for sustained connection over the 5 months.

## **Reflexivity**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) addressed the intersubjective quality of narrative inquiry and the necessity to welcome critical feedback. They cautioned against the dangers of narcissism that can accompany story writing and have no place in empirical narrative writing. They explained that narrative inquirers must be open to receive feedback, as all criticisms have a grain of truth, and are valid to a certain degree (Connelly & Connelly, 1990). Similarly, Wells (2007) suggested that reflexivity is paramount in establishing a narrative inquiry that is trustworthy. Since one of the central assumptions in qualitative research is that the researcher will, undoubtedly, have an influence on the research, reflexivity allows for the researcher to use knowledge of self as a tool to enhance an understanding of the central phenomenon being studied. I practiced reflexivity by conducting a self-assessment and analysis before the onset of data collection by way of writing an autobiographical text. The following questions regarding reflexivity during the research were considered: How did the interviewee and I respond emotionally to each other and what influence did this have on the data? How much do my theoretical assumptions and methodological strategies influence the data? What alternative interpretations to the ones I have drawn are possible in relation to the data obtained? (Wells, 2007). I used a log of field notes to record my thoughts after each relational dialogue in the field in the form of one-to-two-page journal entries guided by the questions above. This allowed for an archival running record that was used for reflection during the composition of interim and final research text, as well as my research analysis.

## Limitations

There are limitations of a narrative inquiry that I considered before committing to the methodology. The time required to build relational intimacy with each of the participants was a potential drawback to this methodology. To tell a comprehensive narrative that fairly portrays the lived experience of the participant requires the researcher to spend a great deal of time with participants. Subsequently, this limited the number of participants that I chose to include in the study and, as such, limited myself to three participants for this study.

One must also recognize the fact that the researcher is considered just as much a participant in the inquiry as the actual participant (Bell, 2002). This dynamic complicates the results of a narrative inquiry as the co-constructed narrative will never be free of research subjectivity and bias. The subjectivity embedded in the methodology raises many questions around the criteria for assessment. The inherent subjectivity of the methodology lends itself to criticism and critique by conservative stakeholders such as school boards (Bell, 2002). To circumvent the inherent issues of subjectivity, a rigorous approach to trustworthiness was included in the study. I used several tools and techniques to address sources of subjectivity that include such things as member checking and prolonged engagement in the field. Furthermore, Maxwell (2012) offered qualitative researchers the suggestion that researchers disclose their personal values and expectations at the advent of the study to ensure transparency of the biases that they bring into the research. To manage my biases, I fully disclosed my positionality as a researcher at the start of the study through writing an autobiographical narrative text.

Similarly, in a study that uses semi-structured interviews, the influence of the researcher on the participant and their environment was also considered as a limitation. Paterson (1992) described the response of the researcher and the research participants to each other during the

research process as “reactivity.” In narrative inquiries that require prolonged and intimate contact between participant and researcher which will result in interactions that may, undoubtedly, influence the behaviour of all parties and the subsequent data that is collected. Rather than mitigating these impacts, I strived to be self-aware and reflexive (Paterson, 1992). For the duration of this narrative inquiry, I kept a journal log of self-reflexive field notes to analyze. The limits of these journals were that the quality of the data obtainable from them was contingent on the level of self-awareness of myself as the researcher.

Finally, the usual levels of relational intimacy involved in conducting narrative inquiry was complicated in this study by the fact that we were amidst a global pandemic. The usual amount of contact between participant and researcher was not possible due to logistical or safety concerns. For this reason, I attempted to stay connected to participants through virtual means including such things as web conferencing, email, text, and phone calls.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this narrative inquiry included the choice to study racialized teachers as opposed to all racialized people in private schools. For the purposes of this study, I wanted to focus on adult experiences in private schools as it more closely relates to my experience as a teacher in private schools. Maxwell (2012) pointed out that selecting a research study which has personal relevance for the researcher is not necessarily a bias that needs to be circumvented. Rather, your personal experience can act as a vehicle for greater insights. To illuminate and fully disclose these insights, I began by conducting a self-analysis in the form of an autobiographical essay.

To fully honour the time involved in building trust, intimacy, and respect between researcher and participant during a narrative inquiry, I limited this study to three participants.

Furthermore, this study focused on racialized teachers and coaches within independent school settings in Canada. This study is intentionally excluding racialized teachers from outside of Canada to explore narratives within a domestic context. Racialized teachers make up a small fraction of the teaching force and independent schools make up an even smaller fraction of the available schools. Finding racialized teachers within the independent school setting who are willing to allow a researcher into their lives was a difficult task and required a larger selection of private schools. In regard to teacher characteristics, I sought to recruit teachers who had five or more years of experience within the independent school system. Teachers with less experience may have offered valid perspectives but may not have been fully integrated into the school culture to offer stories, perspectives, or insights. Additionally, teachers with less seniority in these private schools may have felt less comfortable speaking about their experiences if they felt their participation in the study could have implications for or impacts on their relationship with their employer. I include the experience of both males and females in the sample group chosen to explore as widely as possible, the diversity of perspectives and experiences across genders.

## **Conclusion**

At this important juncture, I reminded myself of the tenuous relationship that racialized people have had with the institutions of academia and research. For this research to serve as a vehicle for material change within our independent schools, there must be a commitment to the communities and people it wishes to serve. Smith (2012) poetically reminded us of the tensions involved in conducting research within racialized communities when she stated:

the nexus, or coming together, of activism and research occurs at the level of a single individual in many circumstances. An activist must get the story right as well as tell the story well, as so must a researcher. (p. 226)

Amidst the various program requirements and academic benchmarks, historically speaking, it has always been all too easy for me to fall into old patterns of focusing on the steps necessary to receive validation from the institution. While my responsibilities as a researcher within academia remain important, I hope to also honour my responsibilities to the racialized teachers who have participated in this study. Perhaps, in telling our stories and sharing them through this dissertation, we can all be liberated from our histories.

## Chapter 4: Narratives

This chapter includes three narratives, compiled from three participants, over three months. Each interview was between 45 minutes to 75 minutes and was meant to capture an understanding of the participants' experiences from childhood to their time teaching in the independent school system. One participant, Sonny, could only offer me one interview, whereas Narin and Farah each had two interviews.

Each participant had the chance to read their transcribed story, narrated by me and offer corrections, suggestions, and amendments. For the safety of each participant and to disguise the name of the schools involved, all names have been anonymized.

As the narratives make clear, all participants came from a South Asian background. This was not by design but rather, presented itself as a potent opportunity to examine my own experiences as a South Asian educator within the independent school system as reflected in the participant's experiences. As I read, and re-read the following narratives, the following themes were salient:

- Assimilation of racialized individuals into the dominant culture
- Sentiments of internalized racism as racialized faculty
- Lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy within independent schools

It is my intention that these narratives illuminate some of the challenges and opportunities present within the independent school system for racialized faculty.



## Preparation

Contraction. I had done all the necessary preparation. I had the questions ready and rehearsed. My laptop was primed with the video conference room open, and my journal was ready on an open page to take notes. I scrambled at the last second to fix my hair in the mirror. Even though I had mentally prepared for this moment, it felt funny. This was my first performance in this role. It was my first “interview”.

I decided to call it a relational dialogue. The word interview carries a different texture which seems tethered to distinct beginnings and endings. This texture oppositional to what I really wanted to create - a space for relational intimacy. The term “relational dialogue” felt more closely aligned with the dynamic I hoped for. Interviews are short. Interviews have a distinct beginning and end. Interviews are finite. In relational dialogue, relationships may be initiated and remain open. Relationships require time. Relationships require trust. Relationships require presence. Relationships may be carried into the future.

Then it was time for my first relational dialogue. Narin was ready on the other end. Letting her into the conference room, I released a sigh to appease the butterflies swirling in my belly. When I am nervous, my speech usually runs at a more frenetic pace. I fumbled over my opening greetings and asked for a pause. I reminded myself that my breath was my anchor and gave myself permission to slow down. Space opened. Expansion.

### **“They can teach me how to be”**

“Fitting in” is a circumstance that many kids struggle with. But, the struggles become particularly painful when your skin is the source of “otherness”. Fitting in was an ongoing concern for Narin, who grew up on the Northeast side of Calgary. During her childhood, the Northeast wasn’t quite as culturally diverse as it is now. Although Narin had a culturally diverse

group of friends, she still felt a certain pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture. There was a desire to fit in and be “normal” that she just could not shake.

There were moments of “shame” and “anger” as a child navigating a world where the culture at school did not quite match the culture at home. For example, her father, having spent his entire adult life in Canada, never fully learned the English language. Narin was often called upon during public interactions to translate from the mother tongue, Punjabi, into the English language.

Narin recalls particularly tender moments of shame in childhood where her mother would pick her up from school in “traditional Indian garb”. Her mom’s adornment of cultural clothing was a stark reminder of her ‘unbelonging’. Similarly, she often would avoid going to cultural events with her parents. Narin remembers thinking, “Why are they setting themselves apart? Why can’t they try to do something to make themselves, be a little bit more Canadian.” The only way to deal with the pain of being different was to reject the source of difference- her culture.

As Narin spoke about her history with shame, I was taken back to my own moments of shame during my childhood - kids making fun of my lunch, or people telling me that I smelled funny. I had not consciously revisited these painful moments from my childhood, but hearing Narin speak about them so openly, it felt as if, I too, was reopening unhealed wounds. Tears of sadness welled up as I metabolized her story.

Most of Narin’s teachers throughout school were white. At the time, Narin thought this was a good thing. She thought to herself, “They can teach me how to be, what I’m supposed to act like and what I’m supposed to enjoy”. The curriculum was another medium that was used to teach Narin about cultures of whiteness. Books would tell the coming-of-age stories of white

characters that Narin could not exactly relate to. These characters were “allowed to date and were allowed to experiment with things”.

She found herself in a difficult place where she felt she wanted to explore new experiences but did not have a roadmap of how to navigate the foreign world of whiteness. It wasn't until high school, where Narin found herself as a student in the class of racialized teacher, that she truly found comfort at school. This was a turning point, as it allowed her to imagine a career in teaching for the first time. Previously, she had felt that she was shackled to the cultural expectations placed on her by her family, especially around her career aspirations.

Narin ended up pursuing her Bachelor's degree at University of Calgary and then would go on to do her Teacher's College degree at the University of British Columbia. During her time in British Columbia, her ideas around race and cultural expectations continued to expand. She began to observe people of various ethnic backgrounds practice and retain their culture in a way that felt more balanced than the ways she saw back home in Alberta. She slowly began to feel internal shifts towards embracing her own culture.

Although her time spent on campus was spent amongst diverse people and diverse cultural experiences, her practicum placement thrust her into a predominantly white school community that mirrored the demographics of a traditional “private school”. It was here, during her first foray into her professional teaching career, that Narin would be tested with the task of teaching the history of colonialism to a class of white students.

She recalled feeling as if the students did not totally “understand” the gravity of what she was teaching to them. “I can see it being a little bit difficult for them to really understand because they don't have that feeling of being overwhelmed by a dominant culture. The feeling like they've been lost or squeezed out.”

Narin reflected on her own feelings of being colonized by the dominant culture growing up. Much like the relationship between the Aztec and Spanish in her Social Studies lessons, she too was subjected to a “squeezing out” by mainstream Canadian culture. It's only now, many years removed from this experience that Narin feels she has some clarity on her experiences as a child growing up in Canadian society.

While reflecting on how her childhood was “traumatic” and “harsh” for her and her family, she showed remorseful honesty about the ways in which she was complicit in making her mother feel as if their cultural heritage was “stupid” or “less than”. “How many times did I make her feel the way that the people in India felt when the British were there? Like that same sense that you're backwards, you're stupid”.

Upon her return to Calgary, she decided to apply for jobs with the public-school board and the independent system. When a job popped up at Alberta Private School, Narin jumped at the opportunity to have her own classroom. The decision to join the independent school system had little to do with culture or race and was more about simple economics. She needed a job.

### **The Beginning**

The relationship between Farah and I, dates to our time as members of the Ismaili Muslim community and also as students within the Concurrent Education program at Queen's University. I had not spoken to Farah for over a decade, so I was feeling a little apprehensive about my first relational dialogue with her. From what I remembered, Farah was relatively apolitical and neutral in times of controversy. Admittedly, she expressed apprehension about her own value to this study, as she felt she had very few insights regarding my research questions. Concerns about my aptitude as a new qualitative interviewer began to consume me. Would I be able to extract a meaningful reflection from the participant? Would I have enough information

from the dialogues to analyze and write stories afterwards? Did I have the right questions lined up? There was a churning ocean of doubt within me.

As I opened my computer and began setting up for the interview, distinct memories of our time together comforted me. Although we had not been close friends, there was a comradeship that I appreciated and could lean on for connection. She was one of the few racialized teachers that had been part of my journey through my undergraduate program.

Reflecting on my time in university often brings up mixed emotions. There were, undoubtedly, moments of joy and growth alongside periods of darkness and pain. Queen's University was where my critical consciousness was awakened. It was where I became aware that my presence at a predominantly white institution was a political statement. It was the place where I was introduced to the works of Paulo Freire and bell hooks. Queen's was a place where I began to find my voice. It was the beginning.

I did not know if Farah's journey as a racialized educator within the independent school system was like mine, but I was eager to find out. As I entered the Zoom conference room, all the tension dissipated. Farah and I exchanged pleasantries and began our first relational dialogue...

**"It's so easy to lose it all..."**

Farah was born to immigrant parents from Tanzania who moved to Canada in the 70s, her parents had fully assimilated to "Canadian culture". So naturally, Farah never spent a lot of time thinking about "the fact that she was brown". Perhaps it was because the place she called home, Markham, Ontario, was very multicultural. Perhaps, it was because she could access a variety of communities where she felt she "belonged". Whatever the reason, Farah naturally gravitated to the Ismaili Muslim and the Indian community for friendships.

As a little girl, Farah never directly felt the hierarchy of race. She openly embraced both her Indian roots and the Western influences that she grew up around. There was a sense of “balance” between cultures. Pictures of the Spice Girls and Britney Spears could be found in her bedroom. Although she never read or consumed books from South Asian authors, or with South Asian characters, she was enamoured by Bollywood culture and actors such as Shah Rukh Khan. Furthermore, she would excitedly await the chance to don her cultural clothing to wear it to Ismaili Muslim functions. There was a safety and “comfort” she found in her culture that she did not find amongst the dominant culture. It wouldn’t be until she left her hometown for university in Kingston, Ontario that Farah would be challenged with questions of belonging due to her race.

Farah was drawn to Queen’s University for its “elite status”. In the Greater Toronto Area, Queen’s was known for having a reputation of a “rich white student” population, which in Farah’s mind, was a good thing. This reputation, undoubtedly, would help her in the working world. However, questions of inclusivity were present for Farah. Would she fit in? Would she be able to make friends? Would she feel comfortable there? It was the first time Farah recalled when she felt her racial identity as “inferior”.

Once again, Farah would gravitate to the Ismaili Muslim community for connection and belonging. She would make friends through her French and Biology classes, but the relationships would never move beyond surface level. Where she felt the most comfortable was with people who shared similar racial, ethnic, or religious identity to her. She would see brown people in her communities who had all white friends. They would be labelled as a “coconut” or “white-washed”, terms that Farah perceived to be a good thing for it meant they were accepted into the dominant culture. For Farah, making friends with white folk felt more like a step outside of her comfort zone, so the friends that “stuck” were those she made through the Muslim community.

As she left Queen's to return home for work, Farah began to focus more and more on learning to be a good professional. The feelings of ostracism or inferiority she felt at Queen's did not have as much of an effect on her daily experience in the classroom in Toronto. Although there have been moments of feeling self-consciousness donning cultural attire in Toronto, Farah is more drawn to the "regular clothes" or "Western attire" out of a desire to feel comfortable. The enthusiasm from her childhood to wear her Indian attire has all but worn off.

There is a sense that the culture that her parents and grandparents grew up with is being "drowned" out by the next generation. Farah feels a desire to maintain a "balance, otherwise it's so easy to lose it all growing up in a Western society". Farah feels this desire from within and from her parents. She explained that her parents have "put so much into the way they brought her up" and although they want her to "keep things going once they are gone", they are "proud" of the person she has become.

Cooking and religion are ways that Farah maintains connections with her family ancestry and her culture. She often visits home to experience her mother's traditional Indian cooking. When asked by others if she knows how to cook a traditional Indian meal, she cannot help but feel judged by her ignorance on the subject. Most of the time, Farah will eat typical Western food. She feels similar sentiments of disconnection from the language and ceremonies performed in the mosque. There is a general sense that without an initiative from her generation to learn the recipes her mother makes, or the languages used for prayers, these traditions will be lost forever.

**"Let's get over it."**

Coming from a lineage of teachers, Sonny's family moved to Edmonton from India when he was only five and a half years old. Both of his parents left their teaching jobs in Punjab to pursue the "immigrant dream" and a "better future". Sonny gets excited as he recalls his first

school experiences at the Alberta Elementary School in Edmonton. He describes the school as being full of “rough knocks” and “lots of immigrants”. Like many new immigrants, Sonny’s family struggled to make ends meet. They did not have a car for much of his childhood. Despite the challenges of living in a new country, he felt a sense of belonging in his school community.

Throughout our dialogue, Sonny references his first principal, Dr. R, with a reverence and admiration that warms your heart. Sonny described him as “a man that was always about community and giving back”. Dr. R became a mentor for a young Sikh boy navigating Canadian culture. While there were people in Sonny’s circle of friends who did not have strong parental role models, many were dealing drugs and getting arrested, Sonny was lucky he could turn to Dr. R for guidance. “He was tough, but fair”. I imagine the reason Sonny felt a sense of belonging was largely due, in part, to his passionate principal.

As Sonny entered junior high school, the demographics of his school changed, along with this relationship to his teachers and peers. His school was primarily comprised of Caucasians, and racial tensions became more noticeable. “I think there were 1200 kids, and, out of 1200 kids, I can count less than 10% were immigrants”. Sonny recalls incidents of being called “Paki” at the free throw line during basketball games. Fortunately, Sonny had a racialized coach, Coach N, who would offer him understanding and counsel during these painful moments.

“I am a grown man. I’ve committed my life here since I was five, right? So, I have the right to say that, in a politically correct manner, Alberta is a racist province. Let’s get over it. We’re not about diversity. We’re using that as an excuse. I can tell you these are facts”.

As Sonny revisits his childhood, I can sense that there are many emotions left to unpack. I am moved by his candor and openness. I wondered how Sonny’s experience would have been different had he not had strong racialized educators to look up to. What other painful experiences



from his childhood were still locked away in the recesses of his memory? Which of these memories were still too painful to revisit? My curiosity and interest grew.

Moving into high school, Sonny did not have a single racialized teacher. It was during this time that Sonny felt a noticeable shift in his relationship to his Indian roots. “I didn’t listen to Punjabi music, Bollywood music. I made fun of Bollywood movies. I was a d\*ck...I didn’t fit in. I got in fights with the Brown guys, because I wasn’t one of them. I didn’t want to hang out with them. So, I left, and that’s when I said, F\*ck these brown people.”

This theme of feeling alienated from the Indian community continued into university for Sonny, where he was labelled as the “coconut” by his group of friends. “I liked brown girls. Did I want to date them? No! Did I want to be around brown people? F\*\*k No! I lost a lot of trust in brown people. If I gave \$100, I knew it would be gone in a blink. If I gave it to a white friend, I knew I would get it back.” He painted a vivid picture of a self-hating young man searching for a sense of belonging.

The distrust that Sonny felt towards the brown community bled into his dating life. He would date brown women, but never thought they were marriage material. That was, until he met his future wife, Sonya. It was through this relationship that Sonny began to find an appreciation for his Indian heritage.

“She’ll tell you that I’m a f\*\*king coconut like there is no tomorrow. But she slowly helped me understand the richness, the food, the culture...And I fell in love [with the culture] because of my wife.” Sonny’s relationship with Sonya cracked his “coconut” shell and inspired him to reconnect to his, once abandoned, Indian roots. He was even inspired to take a solo trip to the motherland. Upon his return, new sentiments of, “hey, it’s okay to be brown. It’s okay to be a

minority and appreciate the music” had surfaced for Sonny. An appreciation for the culture he was born into began to blossom.

### **Writing in Niagara**

In listening to Farah’s accounts of her childhood and about her time in university, not only was I able to capture a vivid snapshot of Farah’s history that led her to the teaching profession, but I was also able to process a great deal of my own story.

The first interview hit on themes within my own life that had, up until then, eluded my awareness. There was a feeling of tension within my jaw that developed as I read about Farah’s idea of being “whitewashed” and using the term “coconuts”. I recalled moments within my own story of being labelled as a “coconut”. Unlike Farah, I never felt this term to be positive. Rather, being labelled whitewashed or a coconut in my own life led me to harbour deep feelings of shame. For me, these terms meant that I had abandoned my cultural roots. I never wore that label with pride, but I had acknowledged the power involved in being accepted into the dominant culture.

As I write about and reflect on this first interview, I am confronted by the unsavoury parts of my childhood that involved disparaging and distancing myself from racialized people that were not as readily accepted into the dominant culture. There were three racialized students in my elementary school, two of which were my brother and I. The third was a girl in my homeroom class named Nourin. I had tried my hardest to design my school experience in a fashion that would allow me to distance myself from her. I went as far as chiming into the jokes white folks made about her clothing or her accent. Shame and regret.

The stories of the participants and reflecting on my own experiences inspired me to revisit my home in Niagara Falls which is where I wrote this chapter which has felt so

therapeutic for me. Unearthing parts of my racialized experience in schools feels more accessible from the safety of my childhood bedroom. Stories of the motherland are served alongside chicken curry and biryani. Archival records of past lives are revisited throughout the day, emerging between Bollywood movies and Arabic prayers.

**“...you just stick to the book.”**

Farah “never really thought about working in a private school” when she was planning out her future teaching career. The opportunity just fell into her lap when a friend was leaving her position at an independent school and thought of her as a candidate for the French Language Arts job. Farah had heard that many people preferred private schools because they had higher salaries or carried more prestige, but she did not find that to be a big factor in her decision. She chose this opportunity more for the “convenience” of needing a job right out of university.

Her school can be found just outside Toronto and is composed of mainly upper-middle class white students. Over the course of her ten years at the school, the demographics became more diversified with more Asian and Indian students. Farah recalls the number of Mercedes that were being driven by students as she completed her morning supervision. Although the staff, were predominantly white during her ten-year tenure with the school, one-third of the staff remained racialized faculty.

Farah never really noticed her race as a teacher at the school. “I didn’t think like, Oh, I’m brown and they’re white, like that didn’t really cross my mind.” Rather, she would notice the parts of the curriculum that omitted people that looked like her or had names like her. She felt a “responsibility to change things to make them more multicultural.” She would consider changing the names of characters in the textbook to reflect the diversity of French speaking people across the world. Farah felt that issues of race and diversity were often “toned down” in her classroom

but would take on a new life beyond the walls of her classroom. Her school held a “Culture Show” every year where the student body would create booths representing various countries around the world to showcase the customs in that country. The Culture Show would be a chance for students to share aspects of their home culture such as food samples, traditional dancing, and even musical instruments. She recalls booths from Tanzania, Poland, Sri Lanka, and India, to name a few. Farah found it to be a “real positive experience seeing how passionate [students] are about their cultures”.

Interestingly, amidst the celebration of culture and diversity through the Show, there was never a direct translation of these values into the policies at the school. There was a notable frustration that Farah shared around the Holiday season. Every year, the administration would buy turkeys as a Christmas gift for the staff. Farah, as a self-identifying Muslim, found herself confused about how to use her Christmas Turkey dinner every year. She found herself thinking, “Okay, we’re celebrating diversity at the Culture Show, but there is no diversity when it comes to the staff holiday aspect”.

The administration’s glaring oversights with regards to culture and diversity would remain with Farah as she considered other areas of school policy. Farah admits that the administration at this school was all white and remains white to this day. She pauses and furrows her brow when recalling a situation where a white colleague with equal amounts of teaching experience and education was offered a promotion at the school. At the time Farah did not think the hiring for the position was race related, but in retrospect, she wouldn’t rule out the possibility. Farah states, “I’ve never really looked at myself as inferior because I’m coloured... I’ve never looked at it like something that’s holding me back from getting to where I want to be career wise”.

When probed about the culture of the school, the word that immediately came to her mouth was “entitlement”. Having experience in both private and public systems, Farah explained that working in the private system brought her face to face with parents and students that were not willing to be held accountable. Parents, and students alike, were more concerned about receiving a particular grade than earning the grade. Similarly, there was a culture within the administration to pander to the client. Farah remembers staff meetings within the private system being driven by the business metrics such as “customer satisfaction”. She felt the responsibility for getting good grades fell on the teacher rather than the students. There was a “nervousness” early in her career that was sustained in dealing with the entitlement from parent and students.

This “business-first” culture would permeate other aspects of her classroom beyond assessment. Farah felt timid exploring social issues within her classroom community. She would often avoid topics of race such as the Black Lives Matter movement out of a desire to be “neutral as possible”. Farah believes that talking about these issues is a shared responsibility amongst teacher and parents. “If I’m taking on that responsibility, I want to know that there’s responsibility at home too.”

The desire to remain politically neutral was imprinted by several factors, including an incident that involved an esteemed colleague being placed on probation when she was accused of using anti-Semitic language in her classroom. Given that her own classroom was very conservative, she remained careful about sharing her own political affiliation with her students. She often felt as if she might get in “trouble for voting Liberal” or be accused of trying to “instill Liberal values” in her students. The agenda of customer satisfaction would be something that would stay with her during her time as a teacher within the independent school system.

Farah noted that the business first mentality of the school manifested as a focus on reputation, scores, and assessments. “The teachers that produced the students with the highest academic averages were considered the best teachers. It wasn’t very much about the values you were instilling in your students. They just want to have a good reputation.” She goes on to say, “If I wanted to branch out a bit more and do more, culturally-inclusive things, I think I would have more hurdles to cross in order to do that.” Later in the interview, she would offer a piercing remark that speaks to this dynamic within the private system - “You don’t want to piss anyone off, so you just stick to the book.”

As she speaks these words, I let out a sigh of relief. There is a sentiment of feeling understood. A sense that I am not the only one feeling these things within the independent system. Countless times, I have wanted to challenge the status quo and instead chose to bite my tongue. I came into this profession looking to use education as a tool for liberation.

During my time within the private system, I quickly learned that the parts of me that were valuable were not related to what I could offer in terms of equity and inclusion. Rather, the value I offered was exclusively related to my skillset in teaching the Alberta program of studies. As Farah continued to share, I could not help but wonder about how many other teachers had felt their fire being extinguished by the education system.

Farah felt as if there was a certain efficiency required to teach at her independent school. School traditions were something that were long-standing and were not to be tampered with. For example, there was a list of resources that most teachers would use for their classroom but there was little incentive to evolve. Farah is sure that the same resources are being used at her former independent school even though it’s been several years since her departure. “They’re probably

still doing *The Giver*. I don't think that's going to ever change. There is not a lot of thought into it. I think it's just a passed-down mentality."

Undoubtedly, the different aspects of Farah's journey which she recollected and described had an impact on me. To live in a predominantly white environment had challenged my sanity. It felt healing, on some level, to have my feelings and experiences corroborated by Farah.

Through our brief but fruitful time together, I had seen a self-proclaimed apolitical friend share some very strong opinions on the nature of her experience within the private school system. I left our conversation with a feeling of connection. Perhaps, in some ways I was also transformed by our conversation. This was not a radical metamorphosis. This is not the type of change I am referring to. Rather, it's akin to the type of subtle internal shifts that occur after a hearty conversation. No one sees a visible difference on the outside, but on the inside, everything feels much more spacious.

**"You found your way home."**

From our conversation, I got the sense that spirituality is important to Sonny. "Teaching is about service. Because at the end of the day, I believe in karma. Once I go, I don't want to come back. Going to school is like going to church, the gurdwara (temple)." Sonny takes his job, and the responsibilities that came along with it, very seriously. Service is a large pillar of his life, inside and outside of his career. Many hours during his tenure at Alberta Private School were devoted to coaching several of the school's sports team, a role that he loved dearly.

As the coach of the basketball team and the physical education director, Sonny felt that there was a double standard in the way that his behavior was perceived by the staff, parents, and

even the league officials compared to his white counterparts. He often wondered what it would have been like if the independent school he taught at was more multicultural.

On the basketball courts, he recalls numerous incidents of being policed for his tone by game officials. “I am a loud person if you’re watching me coach. We have a Caucasian guy, same tone as me, looks just like me. He won’t get a technical foul...I have video evidence”. I get the sense that repeated incidents of discrimination had taken a toll on Sonny. Throughout our interview, Sonny reinforces these parts of his story by referring to his wife’s observations, video recordings, and the word of onlooking coaches. It feels as though I am speaking to a person who’s claims of racism have been ignored for a greater part of his professional career. Now, Sonny has grown accustomed to the double-standards. He’s started to forewarn his teams telling them that they have a “coloured coach” and “it’s a different game for us”.

“It’s hard when you’re watching your players and you’re not getting the same calls and you’re like – I wish I was white. Like I want to write a book that says - I wish I was white and cross up the white part”.

The issues of discrimination were not limited to the basketball court. As only one of two racialized faculty at his school, Sonny often felt targeted by parents. In one instance, a parent came up to him during an open house and asked, “You guys don’t wipe your ass like us, right? You don’t use toilet paper, right?” Sonny was too shocked to get angry. He maintained a professional demeanour and ignored the comment. However, you’d be hard pressed to find a professional not shaken by these prejudiced comments. Questions surrounding his race would continue to emerge in different contexts.

Sonny felt a difference in the way that many administrators related to him compared to his white colleagues. He remembers being denied time off to attend a family wedding, while a



white counterpart was granted a week off for an overseas trip. He felt hurt for this difference in treatment. After all the energy and effort he had invested in building the athletics program at his school, he still did not feel appreciated by the administration. Various accusations against his character had also been made by staff that also made Sonny question whether issues of race played a role in the stones being cast his way.

Sonny often felt as if he was put on display as the “rah-rah guy” at his school. He felt as if white colleagues at the school selectively enjoyed the cultural competence he offered, but refused to listen to the entirety of his experience as a racialized professional.

“They love travelling to India, and having our food, right?...But when it comes to listening when we are trying to come to you and explain. It’s [the listening] not there”. As I intently observed Sonny process his experiences, my stomach sank. I could relate to that feeling of not being heard by other professionals. I could relate to the idea that people wanted to experience the savoury and exotic aspects of my culture but did not have the capacity to be fully present with the less palatable truths of being a racialized professional. Would our voice and perspective be centred if we were white? Is our culture meant to be appropriated for the white audience? Sadly, the feelings of being silenced due to your race was all too familiar.

Despite the adversity that Sonny had faced in his professional career, I could feel a glowing spirit within that still burned brightly. Undoubtedly, this spirit was sustained by his love for service, for community, and the relationships he had cultivated over his career. Throughout our interview he endearingly named all the people that had played a role in his journey. Notably, he mentioned several racialized alumni that he had kept in touch with. Sonny had the privilege of witnessing the alumni leave the school system and find a connection with their Indian roots in university, much like he had done. For many racialized peoples, this is not an easy process. We

spend years lost in dislocation and disorientation. It feels as though Sonny's leadership is serving as a blueprint for countless racialized youth.

"I'm so proud of you. It's like you found your way home."

These words linger in my heart beyond the time and space of our dialogue. We are all just finding our way home. Hopefully, one day I will find myself there too.

**"It was a crime of omission".**

Narin spent nine years at her first independent school and two years at the second. Although she never felt ostracized by her race, she often felt "unintentionally omitted". "There were certainly lots of opportunities for them to embrace the fact that they had a teacher of colour, and they could have utilized that a bit more to their advantage". Narin found this omission "strange" and "ironic" as the demographics of her school became more and more diversified. She had hoped that her knowledge and expertise as a racialized educator would be leveraged to "promote different cultural perspectives".

She would have been honoured by the opportunity to be consulted about her cultural competence to help in building an equitable and inclusive school policy, something that was never present in her time within the private system. She recalls incidents at one of her schools where students of Punjabi descent were using profanity in their mother-tongue on the school playground. The administration moved swiftly to bar the use of the Punjabi language at the school, an act that Narin felt was meant to force assimilation. She was puzzled. "Why not utilize teachers of colour, minority teachers, in your staff at school? Why not ask them their opinions about things before you create these rules?"

Narin drew a fine line regarding the type of contribution she wanted made to the school community regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion. She did NOT want to be only recognized

for the language she spoke, or the food she ate as a racialized teacher. Rather, she was eager to share her nuanced perspective on diversity and race issues as a racialized teacher. She wanted to be included in the conversations about creating more equitable and inclusive school policy. “It was a crime of omission. I think that in many cases, they could have utilized my background a bit better”. She references such things as the student handbook and a lack of policy around racism at her school. She would have liked to be a part of creating more inclusive spaces such as leadership projects or school clubs.

There were events like a Multiculturalism Day where students would dress up in their traditional clothing but that was “the most multicultural that they got”. Narin never found there to be a pinpointed focus on racism within the curriculum either. Instead, she found a way to weave these conversations into her Social Studies classroom. She often used her own lived experience as a racialized woman to talk about issues of race, racism, and colonialism. This strategy was particularly useful when the classes she taught were not culturally homogenous. Having taught at two different private schools, each with varying degrees of ethnic and racial diversity, Narin found the conversations to be much “richer” and full of “emotional substance” when there were a wide variety of perspectives in the room.

“Whether it be a class made up of mostly white students or a class made up of all Indian students there’s a lot of cultural traits that exist within each that provide a natural barrier in understanding what the world is all about”.

When Narin worked at a private school with a predominantly white population, she found the students having a hard time relating to the cultural background of characters from different races. During the reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in her Grade 10 English class, students “couldn’t understand how a person of colour felt that they were lesser than the white person

because that's what happens in that novel". In these instances, her own personal patterns of "kowtowing to people of white background" surfaced. She felt expectations to be respectful of the dominant culture in these cases. There was this tension of wanting to challenge the worldview of her students, without pushing them into a state of guilt or emotional crisis.

The emotion of guilt was something that she often experienced as the "token teacher of colour". Guilt was tied to a feeling of dislocation from her own culture "The Indian community didn't think I was Indian enough, but the white community probably thought the same thing". Anytime there was an issue where a translation was needed to communicate with parents, Narin was called upon. There was a disconnect in what role she wanted to play in her school's growth towards cultural competence and the role she was given. Narin made it clear during our interview that she did NOT want to be the translator or speak on behalf of the Indian students. Rather, she wanted to offer a perspective that could help build more robust policy around racial and cultural equity.

Perhaps things would have been different if there were more racialized administrators in the independent schools she taught at. Over the 10 years within independent schools, Narin never once had an racialized administrator for leadership. "I think if I had a mentor of color, we would have had, I think, deeper conversations, instead of me feeling like I had to always figure out ways to make the material relevant". She felt that having a racialized leader could have helped her "bridge the gap" between the curriculum and the students she taught, a task that she took seriously in her tenure within the private system.

As a new mother navigating the tensions around raising a multiracial daughter, conversations around race have become more important for her. "I think I suppressed it for so long and didn't think I needed to discuss my cultural place. But yea, there is a lot to unpack". Up

until now, no one has really asked how Narin will raise her daughter in a “culturally aware manner”. She wants to avoid her daughter feeling as if she must pick between being Caucasian, Indian, or Japanese. There is an underlying worry that her daughter will find it challenging to identify with the minority cultures, much like Narin did.

Undoubtedly, the material world will not provide any awards or recognitions for this sort of internal work. It requires countless hours of confronting one’s pain, unconscious biases, and shadow. However, what follows is more choice and possibility for the next generation. The impression I got was that the work of “unpacking” is important for Narin as a mother and as a professional.

During our relational dialogues, I witnessed an honesty that is rarely brandished in the hallway banter found within our school systems. I noticed myself yearning for more of these conversations within our education system. More honesty. More bravery. More reflection. More unpacking. I was inspired with hope for the future.

## Chapter 5: Re-storying

If we accept the idea that land is the central defining feature of settler colonialism (Patel, 2015), then private schools act as a fulcrum by which settler colonialism can continue to flourish within the education system. Patel (2015) explained that “settler colonialism trains people to see each other, the land, and knowledge as property, to be in constant insatiable competition for limited resources” (p. 72). Private schools amplify these dynamics through an interweaving of colonial logic through the fabrics of their cultural institutions. The violence that coloniality inflicted on colonized peoples, I felt deeply.

In this chapter, I will discuss the themes arising from the narratives, including: the assimilation of racialized individuals into the dominant culture, internalized racism felt by the study participants, and the lack of culturally sustaining pedagogy within independent schools as reflected in the stories of Narin, Farah, and Sonny. As sub-themes below the larger theme of Assimilation, I highlight the role of acts of omission, multiculturalism as a policy, and discrimination as trauma. Both the major themes and sub-themes present both for the participants as they grew up within an education system that espouses colonial logics, but also later became even more pronounced as they entered their professional careers within the independent school systems. These themes may be regarded as symptoms of a larger systemic problem within both the public and independent school systems. Although it is difficult to disentangle these symptoms from each other within the narratives, I will attempt to do so in this chapter.

## Assimilation of Racialized Individuals into the Dominant Culture

### Omission

In all three narratives, participants spoke of acts of omission. These omissions served as a strategy by which the dominant culture implicitly reinforced the hierarchy of race, and, by extension, placed pressure on the individuals to assimilate into the dominant culture. Both Narin and Farah felt omitted from the culture and school curriculum used by their schools. There were instances revealed in both narratives where both participants felt intentionally or unintentionally omitted from school culture. Narin mentions opportunities where she felt her voice could be used to build more equitable school policy. Instead, she was side-lined from these discussions as the administration moved swiftly to ban the use of her mother tongue from the mouths of Punjabi children on the playground. She wished to be included in the political discussions around race, but her voice was never solicited. Farah mentions noticing the omission of her culture from the school's curriculum and during the holiday season. She felt unintentionally omitted from holiday staff celebrations throughout her time with her school. Although many people would point to these examples as harmless oversights by the school's administration, I would argue that these two examples fit into a larger structural pattern within the independent education system that can be traced back to the beginning of Canadian democracy.

Bannerji (2000) reminded us of the numerous immigration laws that included head taxes, quotas, and miscegenation restrictions that have been enforced on racialized people to limit their participation in Canadian citizenship. The silencing has disproportionately affected racialized women (Bannerji, 2000). Bannerji (2000) explained that the status of women within the colonial Canadian state apparatus is still to be one of property. Legally, emigrating women cannot be

considered the “head of the household” and, as such, are stripped of their autonomy under Canadian immigration law. Thus, these examples of omission towards two racialized women teachers may be rooted in the larger context of Canadian history.

As I thought about both Farah and Narin’s feelings of being left out of the curriculum, I returned to my own experiences of omission and assimilation. I was forced to think about the number of ways that my identity as a South Asian was never affirmed by the curriculum within formal education as a child, but also more recently as a professional working within private education. Much like Narin and Farah, I never found parts of myself reflected in the media I consumed or taught, among the people I interacted with, or in the cultural capital that was valued in our school system. Tarc (2011) describes the inherited curriculum as the “psychosocial representation of human life publicly and collectively read, written, and passed down from one generation to the next.” This vivid description of curriculum bestows power and responsibility on those who deliver curriculum to the subsequent generations. It is no surprise then, that racialized children, who grow up with a partial or incomplete curriculum, begin to view themselves as incomplete or partial. For Narin, Farah, and Sonny the curriculum is very much a “difficult inheritance” (Tarc, 2011), in the sense that their lived experiences and realities are omissions.

I found it very interesting that both Farah and Narin never felt intentionally singled out by their race as professionals, but both reflected on themes of assimilation in sullen tones. Farah mentioned that she felt shame around not knowing how to cook traditional Indian foods, and a responsibility to carry forward her cultural traditions practiced at home and at the mosque. Narin mentioned feeling shame towards her parents since they were not assimilating to the dominant culture and at the same time, she was feeling trepidation around the thought of her biracial daughter struggling to connect with her South Asian cultural heritage. As I reflect on my own



relationship to being omitted and then feeling pressure to assimilate, I feel a deep sense of ambivalence. For many of us, assimilation is the only choice we have for survival. Omission has been used as a strategy to remind us of our place in the racial hierarchy, and assimilation was the choice offered to us as a way to acquire and maintain the limited power and agency granted to us by the dominant culture.

Farah mentions the business elements of her private school throughout her narrative. Farah explained there was a palpable business-first mentality that permeated the staff meetings and interactions between faculty and parents. In her narrative, it was clear that school was a transactional space for the customer and administration. Students felt entitled to a particular experience, mark, and interaction with teachers. Similarly, administration used staff meetings to make sure that teachers were aware that they were there to serve a customer and clientele. In these spaces of privilege, it is hard to imagine conversations around equity, inclusion, and diversity being a priority. The colonial mentality, as found within private schools, posits that knowledge and marks are but one object that can be bought and sold in the pursuit of capital and the further stratification of society. This teacher-centred, “banking approach” (Freire, 2000) has been extremely present during my experiences within independent education. Students are seen as nothing more than “empty vessels in which the culture of the colony should be sown” (Patel, 2021, p. 57).

Narin and Sonny both mentioned feeling omitted from conversations around race and equity at their school. In Narin’s school, the administration overlooked her voice as a source of value to engage in conversations around race. When students of Punjabi descent were using their mother tongue to denigrate each other on the playground, not only was Narin’s voice omitted from the conversation around the consequences, but the administration also moved swiftly to ban

the use of her native language. This form of cultural violence has been a foundational element of the colonial education system. Historically, private education spaces reproduced the dominant culture of whiteness found within the greater society through a myriad of different ways (Patel, 2021). Canadian education has had no shortage of examples of similar authoritarian moves to ban the cultural knowledge held by racialized individuals. Smith (2021) reminded us of the role that colonial education has played in the lives of Indigenous people around the world in the agenda towards assimilation. Smith (2012) brings our attention to the systematic approach within colonial contexts to brand categories of colonized people who assimilated to the dominant culture as “indigenous elite”.

These accounts ring true based upon my own multicultural experience, where I was rewarded with social capital for abandoning my ethnic roots. By anglicizing my name, dressing in Western attire, and learning to behave in ways that appeased the dominant culture, I have lost a large part of my authentic self. I wonder how things would have been different if I had resisted assimilation. What if I had chosen to continue to dress in traditional Indian attire, or continued to speak my mother tongue. Would I have the same levels of success academically as a child, or professionally as an adult? I can imagine that many of the students at Narin’s independent school faced similar questions during such critical moments.

Independent schools, as places of economic privilege, use education to further stratify and achieve status within society. Dwayne Donald (2019) used the term *homo economicus* to describe the particular category of human beings that the education system strives to produce. This category of humans are, “primarily motivated by self-interested desire for wealth and the accumulation of material goods as a primary measure of success” (Donald, 2019). With a focus on teacher centred approaches, traditional approaches to assessment, and emphasis on

achievement and grades, the independent schools found within our narratives were hyper fixated on producing students with the worldview of *homo-economicus*. Patel (2015) reminded us that within settler colonialism, the land, knowledge, other people are considered property. Families and administrators within spaces of economic privilege may see teachers as nothing more than objects to be controlled, and the knowledge taught by teachers, as assets to be attained in the pursuit of accumulating wealth and capital. “Such a stance can quickly collapse complicated projects of social change into agendas of assimilation (Patel, 2015). Racialized teachers may be intentionally omitted from the curriculum, administration, culture of independent schools in pursuit of the Colonial agenda. Relational ethics are sacrificed for an ethic rooted in coloniality.

### **Multiculturalism**

Another way that assimilation is achieved within the education system is through the Canadian political agenda of Multiculturalism. All three participants in their narratives referenced the schools pushing an agenda of multiculturalism through culture shows, marketing campaigns, and strategic plans. At Farah’s independent school, the students put on a “Multicultural Day” where a “culture show” was put on for the school community. As I ruminated on Farah’s story, many questions emerged for me about the framing of such an event. What constitutes culture? For whom is the culture being displayed? A “multicultural day” or a “culture show” does not address any of the systemic issues that plague our education system. Rooted in an ethos of diversity, events like these continue to centre whiteness and do little to dismantle the hierarchy of race.

Sonny mentioned that his opinion was being solicited by his administration about a school-wide multiculturalism campaign to culturally diversify its marketing strategy. One may

think that events like this helps create more inclusion by exposing the dominant culture to a larger perspective; however, many scholars would argue that multiculturalism, as a policy in Canada, has done very little to dismantle the racial hierarchy and has created further division (Bannerji, 2000; Dei, 2005; Thobani, 2007). Thobani (2007) explained how multiculturalism, as an enacted policy within various institutions, serves as cultural enrichment for the national subject to experience. This takes the form of consuming the food, dance, and fashion of the Other during events such as the one that Farah's school engaged in. In doing so, the "national community exalts itself as the tolerant host of all this sound and fury" (Thobani, 2007, p. 169). Conversely, Thobani (2007) argued that the national subject, in tolerating the multicultural other, also exercises its right to express disdain and disavowal for the elements it finds disgusting and revolting. As I read about Thobani's words, I wondered how these dynamics play a part in the lives of the children attending independent schools. Do racialized students operating in these spaces internalize the social codes of inclusion, and subsequently amplify "desirable aspects", while simultaneously distancing themselves from "less-desirable aspects" of their own culture? This raises some important questions about the interrelationships between whiteness, school policy, and the experiences of racialized students. I can only imagine that these messages about social acceptability are amplified within independent schools where there are, arguably, greater barriers to inclusion.

The presence of racialized students and teachers within independent schools may also potentially be leveraged by the Canadian state apparatus to denounce the claims of Aboriginal peoples and make the argument that prosperity is available to all, with just a little more effort. Thobani (2007) argued that multiculturalism has been used to frame diversity as an essential Canadian value that has been present since the country's inception and that the Aboriginal

peoples have simply not learned to share the land. Multiculturalism, as enacted within private schools, may also be a strategy to assimilate racialized people under “white supervision” (Thobani, 2007) and discredit Aboriginal claims as the original caretakers of the land.

### **Discrimination as Trauma**

Each of the participants had a unique response and relationship to the discrimination they faced contingent on their geography, childhood, and attitude concerning whiteness. Narin and Farah both assert in their narratives that they never felt discriminated against as racialized peoples within their independent schools. However, it is important to note that Narin experienced marked moments of feeling shame around her parents and the culture she had inherited. Her words were, “Why are they setting themselves apart? Why can’t they try to do something to make themselves, be a little bit more Canadian.” In contrast, Farah growing up within the diverse community of Markham, generally felt safe as a brown woman. Sonny noted many instances of feeling ostracized which he concluded were based on his race both as a child and as an adult growing up in Alberta. He mentioned incidents on the basketball court and in his role as a professional within the independent school system. Where there is a racial hierarchy being enforced, there will be privileged and unequal relations to power. In this section, I will examine each of the narratives through the lens of racialized trauma.

Rakoff, Siga and Epstein (1966) defined trauma as the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding that is transmitted from one generation to the next. Although two of the three participants in this study never referenced any single act of discrimination within their narratives, as immigrants themselves, or children of immigrants to Canada, I argue that they carry a history of intergenerational colonial trauma that has been passed down from previous

generations. Linklater (2014, p. 23) explained that trauma can be passed down through generations from “parental/institutional patterning as well as through bloodlines.” When racialized people experience discrimination at school, or within the workplace, it may activate this trauma on a cellular level causing a host of psychological and physiological issues for the individual and the community. Each of the three participants may have, consciously or subconsciously, chosen a strategy that allowed them to minimize their exposure to interpersonal racial discrimination. I found myself resonating with Sonny’s recollection of distancing himself from the Indian community. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Farah found herself seeking safety and belonging within racialized communities when placed in predominantly white spaces. Narin, referenced having a traumatic childhood but never recalled individual moments within her narrative. For many racialized peoples, the act of remembering can be difficult as it resurfaces wounds buried deep within the psyche. As a first-generation immigrant from India, I too, felt my own trauma activated as I worked through these participant’s narratives. I wonder how my life may have been different had I had access to supportive racialized communities in my childhood like Farah. I wonder whether or not I would be as politicized about issues of race if I had had the opportunity to affirm my Indian identity through my friendships?

Jane Middleton-Moz defined lateral violence as, “the shaming, humiliating, damaging, belittling and sometimes violent behavior directed towards a member of a group by other members of the same group” (1999, p.116). I imagine the lateral violence that both Sonny and Narin may have inflicted on their loved ones was due to the activation of their own traumas growing up in predominantly white spaces in Alberta. They did not have the same access to safety that Farah received in her childhood, growing up around racialized communities. It may be the case that Farah was able to avoid the activation of this trauma by insulating herself within

her racialized communities. However, as read in her narrative, she could not fully insulate herself from discrimination once she entered university. In reading and analyzing each of the participant's approaches to navigating their experiences, I cannot help but reflect on the choices I made as a youth growing up within predominantly white spaces. It feels as though I too chose to distance myself from my culture in order to minimize the exposure to discriminatory situations. I frequently chose to abandon my ethnic roots and assimilate into the dominant culture to feel included. These choices were not made consciously as a child. However, I can now examine them more closely as an adult. It is during these ruminations that I can process the trauma handed down to me and end the intergenerational patterns of violence that I may continue to inflict on my loved ones. Questions around how I maintain a connection to my ethnic roots within these white spaces of community and school are salient to me.

Although each of the participants had a different experience with racial discrimination, they all carry within them varying degrees of intergenerational trauma from colonial violence that was inflicted on their ancestors. For instance, all three participants, Farah, Narin, and Sonny, described their family's immigration narratives as being rife with hardships such as discrimination and assimilation. Discrimination as a source of interpersonal violence serves as a tool of the dominant culture to force assimilation. It may be the case that within independent schools, the pressures to assimilate exceed those found in traditional public schools, as these schools are more subject to the forces of market capitalism. Subsequently, independent schools may be a place where intergenerational trauma could be activated for racialized peoples. I argue that this process started far before any of the participants were born, but a tipping point was reached as the participants entered their professional lives within independent schools.

Discrimination as trauma also may have led to feeling of internalized racism within each of the participants. This will be the focus of the next section.

### **Internalized Colonization**

As I read the narratives and reflected on my experiences as a racialized persons within the independent school system, it became increasingly important for me to address the violence of the colonial apparatus on the psyche of the individual. Settler colonialism relies on internalized racism to perpetuate its continued agenda of land seizure and extraction of free labour from racialized communities (Tuck & Yang, 2012). **Internalized racism** as defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), is the internalizing and acting out of the messages that your group is inferior to the dominant group and thus, deserving of a lower status in society. However, agreeing with Thomas (2013), I posit that the effects I experienced within colonial constructs such as independent schools, went beyond race and must be more fully investigated. Thomas (2013) speaks of **internalized colonization** as the experience of colonized populations accepting the superiority of whites and believing in their own inferiority. Without pathologizing the participants or myself, the concept of internalized colonization must be addressed as a possible symptom of the colonial apparatus evident and substantiated by the participants' lived experiences as shared through the narratives. I will examine symptoms of internalized colonization as seen through the participants: emotions, behavior, language, and relationship to their choice of romantic partners.

### **Becoming a Settler**

All three participants shared deeply intimate emotions around their experiences as racialized peoples within the private education system. The feelings of shame towards their



culture were present in the childhood narratives of Sonny and Narin, but these feelings manifested slightly differently. Narin explained the shame around seeing her mother wearing cultural attire and her noted discontentment around her father not knowing English. She even goes as far as claiming the ways in which she was complicit in being a colonizing force towards her parents. Similarly, for Sonny, the shame he experienced around being a racialized individual within a white society manifested as a disparaging attitude towards the Indian community. He distanced himself from the culture. He mentions a harsh disdain for anything Indian - music, movies, and people. Notably, both participants grew up in Alberta where the Indian diaspora is far less prominent in numbers compared to Toronto, where Farah grew up. Patel (2021) reminded us that the “American Dream” that many immigrants have internalized is nothing but a false narrative. Many immigrants have falsely bought into the colonial myth of meritocracy that says that our access to capital and status is dependent on our ability to follow the rules and work hard. Clearly, for Narin, her father’s inability to “follow the rules” by learning English, resulted in a shameful reminder of their place in the colonial hierarchy. In the words of Fanon (1986) “all people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by death and burial of its local cultural originality (the colonized populations) find themselves confronted by the language of the civilizing nation” (p. 82).

Sonny’s childhood was riddled with angst around his culture and race. He emphatically says in his narrative, “I wasn’t one of them...F\*\*\* these brown people”. I feel these words echo through my bones. I am transported back to moments in my childhood where I covertly expressed similar sentiments around the Muslim community in which I grew up in. I wanted nothing to do with the uncivilized ways of the brown man. Once, I even attempted to wash the brown off my skin in the shower. What I strived for was white validation and white acceptance.

Fanon's (1967) talked about this phenomenon when he indicated that, "The negro makes himself inferior. But the truth is that he is made inferior" (p. 149). Sonny and my own dis-identification with brown people was simply an expression of the things that the colonized environment was reminding us about ourselves from moment to moment. We had consciously or more likely, unconsciously, internalized our place within the colonial hierarchy. Everywhere Sonny and I went, the messaging we received was to be brown, was to accept your role within the settler/native/slave triad (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The only way we could achieve settler status is to invalidate those that have yet to fully become settlers themselves. Presumably, education is one of the many institutions within colonial settler society that invited formerly colonized peoples into the fold by inculcating them with teachings and culture about how to fully embody the traits of a settler. The internalized colonization felt by Narin and Sonny are part of the tensions involved for all immigrants as we navigate our role within settler colonial society.

All three of the participants expressed an ambivalence around expressing their identity as South Asians, while trying to fit into the dominant culture. Narin expressed the ways in which she was complicit in forcing the dominant culture on her parent's. She also recalls tender moments of shame and guilt around her parents expressing their South Asian identity. It wasn't until university, where she saw exemplars of "balance", that Narin felt safe enough to embrace her cultural and ethnic roots. In a less explicit way, Farah expressed sentiments of responsibility around maintaining the cultural traditions of her family by learning the recipes her mom cooks or the language used in religious ceremonies. These sentiments are juxtaposed with feelings of self-consciousness around wearing her cultural attire as an adult. It was interesting to note that Farah centres the dominant culture by naming the clothing she currently wears as "regular clothing". This is but one example of how colonialism permeated the thoughts and language of the

participants. Sonny's ambivalence is captured concisely when he states. "Like I want to write a book that says, "I wish I was white and cross up the white part". I interpreted this statement as an explicit cry for help from a professional who felt disempowered by a system designed to silence him. His desire for whiteness was not an admonishment of his ancestral roots, rather it was an astute tactic to subvert the dominant culture. After a lifetime of anguish, Sonny seems to have grown into his brown skin. The latter half of the statement, "cross up the white part", reminds the reader that, it is the power synonymous with whiteness that Sonny is actually after; not the whiteness in and of itself. As I reflect on the effects that internalized colonization has had on the participants and myself, I am forced to think deeply about the powerful words of W.E.B Dubois in *Souls of Black Folks*:

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face" (p. 5)

All the participants felt the same sentiments of "double consciousness", in that they had internalized the metrics imposed on them by settler society. Negotiations ensue because of the settler society's insistence on erasing and denying their entire personhood. Much like DuBois, all three participants expressed a desire to maintain both parts of themselves: the cultural identities of their ancestors and the identity as a settler on this land. Independent schools are spaces where

there is little room for negotiation of these identities. Spending time in these spaces as a racialized person inevitably leads to the slow and painful death of our cultural identities, as we move toward the full adoption of the settler identity.

Freire (2000) argued that the antidote for internalized colonization is a development of the “*conscientizacao*” or critical consciousness. From the narratives that have been shared, we get a sense of the different stages of the journey towards greater critical consciousness. As I have evolved in my journey, this idea of “critical consciousness” no longer resonates with me as deeply. Rather, I am finding myself more drawn to the idea of “decolonizing the mind” as expressed by Fanon (1963) and Wa Thiang’o (1998). In Fanon’s articulation of this concept, an awakening of the minds of the colonized through an unlearning of colonial logics is the first step towards overthrowing colonial regimes. For those of us who have been inculcated into the cultures of private schools, this may be a tall order. By the time we are in our professional careers, the internalization of the colonial apparatus within the minds of the colonized has successfully been accomplished to the degree that we can now reproduce it within our own classrooms. While I wholeheartedly agree with Fanon’s (1963) sentiments that “decolonization of the mind” is an important first step towards justice for colonized people, some argue that it cannot be the only step. Tuck & Yang (2012) insisted that decolonization of the mind must also be accompanied by a repatriation of Indigenous land and life. What does it mean in the context of independent schools? If independent schools are spaces designed to push the colonial agenda on stolen native land, then perhaps they should not exist altogether. Perhaps there is some middle ground to explore between Fanon (1963) and Tuck & Yang’s (2012) conceptions of decolonization.

## Coconuts

Both Farah and Sonny spoke about the concept of a “coconut”. The term describes the experience of being brown on the outside, but white on the inside and likens this to the tropical fruit. Whereas Farah used this as a positive term to identify members of the South Asian community at university who were readily accepted into the white community, Sonny used the term to critically reference himself. Presumably, being a coconut is a privilege that is not bestowed on every racialized brown person. As such, being a “coconut” must be a coveted position by racialized peoples within settler society. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of “mimicry” comes to mind as I think about the phenomenon of being labeled a “coconut”. Singh (2009) explained that mimicry is a pattern of behaviour in which the colonized subjects copy the language, dress, politics, and mannerisms of those in power in the hopes of accessing the same power. Bhabha (1994) explained that “mimicry” does not have to be a bad thing, as it can be used as an unintentional tactic to subvert the dominant culture. However, agreeing with Gandhi (2021), when applied to my own experiences, the choice to mimic was a survival mechanism rooted in insecurity and was based upon a desire for acceptance. I can vividly recall moments where I abandoned my cultural ways out of fear of ostracism or ridicule. It is only in adulthood that I have had the opportunity to reflexively examine the “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1988) that the colonial order had inflicted on me. The South Asian ways of dressing, eating, and talking were leveraged by the dominant culture to remind me of the colonial order and where I belonged in it. Although I cannot speak for Sonny, I cannot imagine that subversion through mimicry was the impetus behind pushing his family and community away. This would be an awfully painful price to pay for acceptance into the colonial order.

In addition, various patterns mentioned in the narratives can be unpacked through the lens of internalized colonization. Narin mentions the idea of “kowtowing” to members of the dominant culture in her classroom when issues of racism arose. Similarly, Farah found herself withholding her political opinions during her tenure within her independent school out of fear of reprimand. I would like to refer to Thomas’ (1995) idea of the “proxy self” to explain the pressure that racialized peoples feel to perform and pander to the dominant culture, especially in professional contexts. Thomas (1995) explained that the “proxy self” was the mask that many black and minority ethnic children put on in a society that might be hostile, non-facilitating or threatening to them. Historically excluded people must constantly display their “settler persona” or “proxy self” to settler society to prove that they can fit in amongst settler society. This could result in subservient behavior by the teacher, even when there are relations of authority and power between teacher and student. What would happen if Farah and Narin were to speak their political truths within the confines of their classrooms? Would they be seen as “too radical” by their white students? How would removing their “settler persona” affect the relationships they sustained in their classroom? Would the administration in independent schools be more concerned with their customer’s experience than a teacher’s autonomy and freedoms? Conversely, how do the participant’s settler identities stand with other members of the South Asian community? Are they still considered coconuts? These questions can only be amplified when applied within the sphere of independent schools, which are a place where settler culture is rewarded and reproduced through a culture of ranking and ordering. Ranking and ordering takes place throughout - from a focus on standardized testing to curriculum that prioritizes the Eurocentric worldview. These socially constructed hierarchies further divide and separate people within independent schools.

Fanon (1952) offered the pathology of “abandonment-neuroticism” to explain the kowtowing behaviour displayed by colonized peoples within their classrooms in settler society. “The abandonment-neurotic doubts whether he can be loved as he is, for he has the cruel experience of being abandoned when he offered himself to the tenderness of others as a little child” (Fanon, 1952, p.77).

Racialized peoples spend a great deal of energy building and curating a “settler persona” that could be consumed by the white masses. From my experience, there was constant anxiety trying to maintain acceptance from both the dominant culture while staying connected to the part of me that was rooted in Indian traditions. I found myself waiting patiently for cues regarding which parts of my Indian identity I could comfortably disclose without disapproval or ostracism from settler society. I never willingly offered these parts of myself. My people-pleasing behaviour towards white folks was a symptom of this abandonment wound that had been forged during my childhood. This wound was birthed out of offering my Indian parts to the dominant culture only to be rejected and ridiculed. I am noticing that these feelings have been exacerbated and have re-surfaced within independent school culture. For many years, I was hyper-vigilant about what I shared regarding my race or culture within a professional setting. My cultural identity continues to be tucked away safely in the recesses of my psyche when I am with my work colleagues or students. There is a continued anxiety around the degree of my assimilation and the level of my acceptance by peers. The most intimate and rich parts of my experience as a South Asian man have often been reduced to a palatable appetizer offered to the dominant culture on “Multicultural Days”. These experiences always left me feeling empty and vapid. When one has been raised in a society embedded in colonial construction, we begin to wonder

where the settler parts are prioritized, and the Indian parts are repressed. I question if there is any place in my life where the Indian parts were prioritized?

Sonny addressed this phenomenon directly when he says, “But they love traveling to India, and having our food right? But when it comes to [the listening] it’s not there.” As I read these words by Sonny, I am reminded of Said’s (1979) words on the objectification of the Orient. Said (1979) explains that the relations between Orient and Occident is a relationship filtered through the lens of power as gained through a knowing, ordering, and structuring for the benefit of the colonial powers. The people within Sonny’s independent school had no interest in learning about true cultural experiences from Sonny. Rather, many operated under the assumption that they already had an understanding from their “textual understanding” (Said, 1979, p. 93) of India and its culture. There was little reason for them to truly listen to Sonny’s experience, as they already knew what they believed they needed to know about Sonny’s experience from the colonial representations of India, perhaps learned from trips to the local Indian restaurant and travel brochures. These sorts of orientalist assumptions about our experience left me feeling drained and frustrated. What would it take for my administration, white colleagues, and students at my school to slow down enough to listen to the entirety of my experience before claiming an understanding? Where in my life was I also applying similar “textual understandings” of people’s experiences and effectively circumventing my responsibilities of truly living in relationship with them? Would there ever be a place in my professional career where I could fully embody my authentic self without fear of reprisal?



## Colonialism in Relationships

Another area of inquiry that I am interested in concerns how internalized colonization affected the experiences of the participants' romantic relationships. My ears perked up when Sonny described his distaste for dating brown women growing up. Sonny candidly explained that he did not want to ever date brown women throughout young adulthood and into his university career. Sonny ended up marrying a brown woman. However, this aversion sparks my interest in the ways that settler society and colonization influenced his choice of romantic partner. Fanon (1952) explained that the psyche of the colonized individual suffers in three main ways: anguish, aggression, and devaluation of self (p.73). In attempts to overcome these symptoms, Fanon (1952) proposed that colonized peoples will try to elevate self to the white man's level in whichever way he can. For racialized people, like Sonny and myself, this may have taken the form of choosing to date white women instead of South Asian women. Being in and around professional environments that are predominantly white women does not help this complex. There are moments during my single bachelor life where I have found myself daydreaming of bringing a white woman to our next staff function and the social capital it would provide for me. White women became another object to attain in my ascension towards white-settler status. Would my proximity to whiteness be validated by a white woman on my arm?

These questions remind me of what Lowe (2008) describes as the “colonial object relations”. In a colonial object relation, there is a tendency for the colonizer, or white parts, of our psyche to control or push away the black, or colonized, aspects of our psyche. This “paranoid-schizoid split” (p.22) causes several defensive mechanisms including such things as projective identifications, which reproduce white superiority. Lowe explained that these dynamics are present not only within the internal psyches of individuals, but are also embedded

within external societal realities, such as education systems. By using white women as an object to validate the “colonizer” aspects of my psyche, I was implicitly denying the colonized elements of my inner and outer worlds. Perhaps there were similar internalized colonial relationships between Sonny’s colonizer and colonized internal objects, where the “unwanted and unbearable parts of the self had to be rid of, through projection” (p. 27). What would it take for the racialized professionals working within the independent school system to heal these psycho-pathologies where the internal colonial object is reinforced and reproduced? To work in an independent school and deny the superiority of the white colonial object would be a potent act of resistance. As I speak these words, I am realizing the power residing in my individual resistance within these spaces and the responsibility of “finding my way back home” as an act of decolonization. Now what this looks like in practice is still unknown to me.

It is important to note that there was a difference in experience between the racialized gender experiences between participants. Sonny’s experience as a male within his independent school revealed different themes compared to Farah and Narin. Statistics Canada (2013) reported that in the country 68% of the teaching workforce as self-identifying females compared to a self-identifying male teaching population of 32%. This disparity presumably also applies to the independent schools where the participants were employed. While this situation made recruitment of racialized males challenging for my study, the disparity leaves many questions around the differences in the experiences across genders within independent schools. Due to the limited availability of male participants in my study, I cannot confidently report or discuss the differences between the racialized gendered experiences of persons in this study. Future studies may find it valuable to explore these differences in experience.

In the next chapter, I will address the limitations, possibilities, and tensions concerning Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a decolonial approach within independent schools.

## Chapter 6: Lack of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Deficit approaches to teaching and learning have been rife in our education system. Since the 1960's and 70s (Paris, 2012), language literacies, and cultural ways being of many students from racialized communities have been viewed as a deficiency to be overcome through the school process. In response to these deficit approaches to teaching and learning, Gloria Ladson-Billing (1995) published a landmark article "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy". The idea of culturally relevant teaching has inspired a new generation of scholars who are wanting to promote culturally-relevant pedagogy with an orientation towards teaching that supports and sustains the culture from non-dominant groups within the democratic project of school (Paris, 2013). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) as an educational approach is particularly intended to depart from whiteness and colonial logics in hopes of centering and sustaining Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander communities (Paris, 2021). Although varied in expression across communities, this pedagogical approach is grounded in four key features:

1. A critical centering of dynamic communities, their valued languages, practices, and knowledge across settings.
  2. Student and intergenerational community agency and input, where families, elders and students are understood as central collaborators in learning settings.
  3. Working to be in reciprocal relationships with the land and people of the land.
  4. Structured opportunities to contend with internalized oppressions, false choices, and inward gazes that may centre and sustain oppression.
- (Paris, 2021)

CSP calls for sustaining and revitalizing that which has, over the centuries, sustained racialized communities - to resist, revitalize, and reimagine - under enduring colonial conditions that constantly work to diminish the intellectual capacities, cultures, and languages (Alim &

Paris, 2017) The pedagogical practices within independent schools will be examined in hopes of bridging the “ontological distances” (Dominguez, 2017) between CSP and dominant paradigms. Alim and Paris (2017) explained that the first step in developing a CSP approach to teaching, is a radical restructuring away from the “white gaze” in schools that view the linguistic and cultural practices of racialized communities through a deficit lens. An asset-based pedagogical approach re-positions the linguistic and cultural practices of racialized communities, to honour, explore, and extend them as assets. Although a tall order, independent schools with access to social, political, and economic capital have an opportunity to be sites where change can be made. In the following pages, I will apply Paris’ (2021) four tenets of CSP to independent schools to explicate the possible opportunities, tensions, and limitations that may arise from such an endeavour.

### **1. Centering Dynamic Communities**

The first feature of CSP named by Paris (2021) was a critical centering of dynamic communities along with their valued languages, practices, and knowledge across the learning setting. Honouring various language traditions within educational settings can be a first step towards a CSP within independent schools. In the US, and perhaps in Canada, there seems to be a backlash to speaking languages other than Dominant American English in the public sphere (Irazarry, 2017). Independent schools who teach students the keys to accessing power through a mastering of Dominant American English (DAE), are implicitly furthering the colonial agenda. Patel (2021) reminds us that spaces driven by capitalism, operate under the false assumption that the cultural practices and knowledge of the upper strata are superior and are then reified as inherently better. These settler dynamics are, undoubtedly, present within the independent school system driven by profit-based approaches and agendas to education. Alim (2004) referred to this phenomenon as *linguistic supremacy*. Many racialized students within the education system are

demonized and pathologized as morally, culturally, or intellectually deficient for use of their native languages at school (Bucholtz, Ines & Lee, 2017). By shifting away from monolingualistic policies, these spaces can serve to empower racialized youth within independent schools to understand their language as creative and innovative instead of a source of deficit or shame. (Bucholtz, Ines & Lee, 2017) Students who practice their linguistic traditions openly in these spaces, like the ones in Narin's story, are actively resisting and subverting the dominant cultural expectations. Patel (2021) might refer to these as acts of "fugitive learning" (pg. 119) or an "enactment of life, as resisting the colonizing bandages of body and spirit, essential to the projects of wellness for all living beings" (pg. 120). Independent schools can incorporate these moments as opportunities to celebrate the cultural and linguistic identities of all their students, not just the upper-middle class white ones.

Although many independent schools may have language programs that teach students about the syntax, grammar, and vocabulary of various non-English linguistic practices, they are done in a manner that still reifies the settler colonial apparatus. Cultural knowledge and languages are taught through the frame of settler logics, teaching students that language is an asset to be attained in pursuit of capital and property. Concomitantly, cultural traditions and language, when used outside of this purpose are seen as deficiencies to be overcome (Paris & Alim, 2014). A model of education grounded in CSP will look to sustain the linguistic and cultural practices of those present within the classroom and leverage it as a resource for challenging structural inequality and achieving institutional access (Bucholtz, Ines & Lee, 2017).

Secondly, a complete de-centering of the Euro-centric curriculum within independent schools must take place for the first tenet of CSP to fully flourish. If independent schools are to move towards a CSP model, it will require a disruption of the "banking approach" (Freire,

1973/1974) to education. In the current approach found within schools, the rich cultural histories, epistemologies, and practices of colonized individuals are deemed extraneous to those found within the dominant culture. Furthermore, Eurocentric approaches to education place the teacher as the keeper of the knowledge and students as passive recipients. A culturally sustaining approach to education within independent schools would require a movement towards more student-centered approaches that used the collective and individual knowledge, experiences, and traditions of the classroom community as valuable capital that informs content and teaching. Faculty and students would be required to make ontological shifts that privileged collaboration and community over the settler colonial logics of meritocracy and individualism. (Irazarry, 2017). A student-centered approach to education would also require independent schools to reconsider their proclivities for standardized achievement tests that regularly reproduce the ranking and ordering found in the hierarchal systems found within settler colonial society. Such an approach would not only radically shift the power within the classroom from teacher to student, it could also serve as an effective means to build bridges of solidarity across lines of difference (Irazarry, 2017).

While disrupting Euro-centric notions of curriculum within a CSP framework may look different across the traditional disciplines taught in schools, many scholars point to a key feature of a student generated curriculum where a co-constructed space for learning is led by student choice (Smith, Avraamidou, Adams, 2022). In the context of a science classroom, this may be notably more difficult as most teachers continue to teach science through a learning of discrete facts to be memorized instead of active inquiry and collective student-centered problem solving. A CSP approach to science education asks that teachers “seek out the knowledge and skills that students are gaining in their homes and communities and then look for connections to better

understand the school science curriculum” (Harman et al., 2021). Smith et al. (2022) demonstrate multiple examples of a CSP-inspired framework within Science programs in Dutch contexts where educators start sessions with Indigenous inspired circle work to create a collective consciousness before jumping into collaborative group projects. Within independent education, where there are smaller class sizes, there may be more opportunities to engage students through these types of time intensive processes. Smith et al. (2022) also demonstrates compelling use of storytelling within science classrooms to engage cultural competency. Buffington & Bryant (2019) showed the use of “cultural artifacts” and local “community insiders” in meaningful and culturally sustaining ways within an art classroom.

Good-Perkins (2021) challenged Euro-centric and colonial notions about music education by offering the term “epistemic travel” as a potential solution. In this CSP-inspired approach, rigid frameworks of normalized behaviour within the music classroom are surrendered for a hybrid musical epistemology that includes more embodied relationships to music that are found in cultures around the world. Good-Perkins (2021) explained the ways in which Euro-centric music epistemologies divorce the mind from the body and, in-turn, silence the “singing body”. She draws on the rich cultural practices that student’s use in their homes, like dancing and movement, to relate and engage with music in the classroom. Ervin (2021) championed the uses of a diverse and inclusive literary canon paired with critical literacy pedagogical approaches as an expression of CSP within the Language Arts Curriculum.

While these case-studies prove that CSP can work within various school contexts, there remain many questions around what this will look like within the independent school setting. What sort of student generated curriculum would be (re)produced in predominantly white spaces? Would there be an undue pressure placed on racialized students to add critical



perspectives to the co-created curriculum? At the risk of tokenizing racialized students within these settings, educators should be mindful of these critical questions and tensions when applying CSP in an independent school setting. Swalwell (2013) gently reminds us that teaching those with “privilege” will not look the same everywhere and will require a nuanced pedagogical approach in trying to disrupt how students position themselves and the systems that benefit them.

Swalwell (2013) identified many tensions that arise when teaching privileged youth from a social justice approach in “elite” school settings. She explains that in independent schools that promote meritocratic thinking, there may be the expectation that school must function as a place to prepare students for future careers and entry into competitive colleges. Swalwell (2013) used case studies to explain that teachers looking to centre marginalized perspectives and use democratic practices may need to be mindful of the resistance that parents may feel towards an education designed to interrupt socio-economic inequalities. Although the employment of CSP may offer similar challenges, using the student’s lived experiences as the source of critical curriculum may be an effective approach when including new and diverse perspectives. The drawback of this approach is that it relies on the presence of heterogeneous lived experiences for it to be effective. What are the possibilities of CSP in a classroom with primarily cis-white, upper middle-class students? How does one centre marginalized voices using CSP in a classroom with those that identify with the dominant culture? This brings us to the second tenet of CSP that can be used to make the schooling project more equitable.

**2. Student and intergenerational community agency and input, where families, elders and students are understood as central collaborators in learning settings.**

Input from elders, family, and community agency as central collaborators is another central feature that must be incorporated into independent schools as a de-colonial practice which may help inform the curriculum used in classroom settings. Paris and Alim (2019) asked, “How do we confront practices that emanate from a celebratory stance towards community cultural resources? For this section, I shift my attention towards using Elders within the co-creation of school curriculum in all educational settings as a community resource.

In many Indigenous communities, Elders are considered mirrors of ancestors (Holmes & Gonzalez, 2019). From a traditional Indigenous standpoint, being an Elder is not defined by chronological age, but rather they are those that carry the “sacred and secular ways of their people” (pg. 209). An integral inclusion of local Indigenous elders within the creation of curriculum within the classroom is a real opportunity for independent schools. For students in these contexts to fully embrace and understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being, they must be exposed to what Holmes (2019) termed as *Elder praxis*. She described *Elder praxis* as a relational way of being that embodies the traditional teaching and values that are meant to be passed down to the next generation. It is through an embodied inclusion of these values of - generosity, slowness, respect, and care - in our school curriculum, that the possibilities may be found for our collective human survival (Holmes & Gonzalez, 2019). Children from privileged communities who attend independent schools are very likely to occupy positions of power as they grow older, and a prolonged exposure to these values may be an important strategy in interrupting structural injustice (Swalwell, 2013). These are values that can be learned with the help of local Elders and generational family practices not found within the dominant cultures.

While independent schools may have greater access to resources that can be used to build and sustain relationships with the community elders, this tenet of CSP presents some unique challenges for this context. This approach to education, rooted in collectivist values, is an extension of the first tenet that sources the curriculum from the lives and experiences of the students within the classroom. A small body of empirical work has shown that students who excel within privileged school settings tend to be those that embrace individualism, hierarchies, and the myth of meritocracy (Swalwell, 2013). Patel (2021) also stated that a central feature of settler colonialism is an erasure of Indigeneity. How would an approach grounded on collectivist, relational values of collaboration and community, change the dynamics of the curriculum within independent schools? Even if these values were to be embraced, what kind of curriculum would result if the parents, elders, and surrounding community agencies espoused values that reproduced settler colonial values? Would this still be considered an educational practice grounded in CSP? I will argue that for the practice to be considered CSP, it must embody all four of the tenets. Without even one of the tenets, the essence of CSP has been lost.

### **3. Working to be in reciprocal relationships with the land and people of the land.**

Cajete (2015) used the concept of “land as an educator” to express the understanding that the land is, “the first and most essential teacher and community member and the origin of Indigenous culture (p. 46). Marom and Rattray (2022) explained that a land-based pedagogy taught through an Indigenous epistemological and ontological framework can disrupt Western knowledge systems and help develop an awareness of the limitations of a student’s Euro-centric worldview. By providing opportunities for students of privileged backgrounds to develop a personal relationship with the land they inhabit, they may begin to develop a critical understanding of issues concerning Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

Independent school systems, along with all private land-owning institutions, have a complex relationship with land that would present many challenges for a meaningful expression of this tenet of CSP. Patel (2021) noted that, “every post-secondary institution of learning sits upon what was once sovereign Indigenous land, often under a matriarchal system” (p. 28). I imagine the histories of most independent schools mirror this dynamic. As such, independent schools must begin with an honest reflection on their historical relationship with the land and its original caretakers before moving towards land-based pedagogies. To begin this process, I would suggest that independent schools put an intentional hold on the acquisition of land and expansion of their campuses. Furthermore, Marom and Rattray (2022) currently suggest that developing sustained relationships with local Indigenous leaders and cultural teachers would be necessary for an intentional enactment of land-based pedagogies. This may be a salient opportunity for independent schools to pause and reflect on their colonial histories and how they can work towards Truth and Reconciliation. To foster these relations with the community, Swalwell (2013) suggested that educators use the strategy of “bursting the bubble” (p. 41), where students are taken outside the boundaries that separate and shelter them from those people that they see as dangerous or less deserving. Field trips that bring students onto the land and to learn alongside elders and those that already have a deep reciprocal relationship with the land may be another starting place for independent schools.

#### **4. Structured opportunities to contend with internalized oppressions, false choices, and inward gazes that may centre and sustain oppression.**

Paris and Alim (2017) discussed how the last tenet of CSP challenges the “panoptic white gaze that permeates educational research and practice” (pg. 2). The primary question practitioners will need to address is how white students and teachers within predominantly white

institutions can de-centre the white gaze within independent schools. Ultimately, this challenge lends itself to a deeper question around Freire's (2000) idea of critical consciousness and how to cultivate it within spaces operating under colonial logics. None of the strategies and tenets described in previous sections can be effective unless they are tethered to an approach that helps bolster and cultivate the critical consciousness of the populations. Greenwood (2022) argues that the critique aspect of Freireian praxis is the easy part of developing a critical consciousness, as the literature that focuses on critiques of oppression are ubiquitous. Rather, he argues that the second aspect of developing a critical praxis - developing practices that support continued learning - is much more demanding as it involves a nuanced understanding of both intrapersonal psychology and inter-cultural group sociology. Greenwood (2022) at present, believes this work, which he names "soul work", has no universal formula and requires a deep faith in people's abilities to learn and change. How do independent schools designed under colonial logics of meritocracy, scientific positivism, and market capitalism provide space and practices for students to "support their own becoming- in relationship with ourselves, each other, the land, and the cosmos itself"? (Greenwood, 2022, p. 371) Greenwood (2022) believes that this *soul work* is the starting point to bridge the epistemological gaps between Indigenous and settler society.

Throughout history, there have been several pedagogical approaches grounded in a variety of traditions that create structured opportunities to examine internalized oppressions. Some of these approaches include *critical pedagogy* (McLaren, 1998), *anti-racist education* (Nieto, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; and *anti-oppressive education* (Kumashiro, 2004). Each of these distinct, yet interrelated conceptual approaches, share the fundamental principles of *social justice education* (Swalwell, 2013). Chubbuck and Zembylas (2008) defined *social justice education* as "a teacher's effort to transform policies and enact pedagogies that improve the

learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students while equipping and empowering them to work for a more socially just society themselves” (p. 285). There are several classroom strategies grounded in social justice education that can cultivate introspection and reflexive understanding of self that Greenwood (2022) presented as *soul work*. Ervin (2021) offers the strategy of *pairing texts*, where student -chosen texts are read alongside required texts. This strategy provides opportunities for students to critically examine the dominant ideologies found within canonical literature and add their own voices to curriculum. Counter storytelling (Delgado, 1989, (Ervin)) and re-storying (Dyches, 2018) are strategies that have been proposed which can challenge the idea of neutrality by pushing students to take on new identities and allow space for youth to challenge dominant narratives. Assessment strategies such as *authentic assessment* (Wiggins, 1989) and open-ended essay questions can provide opportunities for student reflexivity as well. Teachers who invite the student’s various identities into the learning process and ask challenging questions as they make sense of literature, can be rich grounds for developing a critical consciousness. Creating ‘transcultural narratives’, offered by Gill and White (2013), is where, “two or more individuals reflect on their own social and institutional locations in ways that allow them to identify how their identities intersect and what are the implications of those intersections in the “contact zone” (p. 27) is a relational writing strategy that educators may find useful.

It is important to acknowledge that strategies alone cannot provide the psychological safety required for students coming from privileged backgrounds to look inward and examine the ways in which they are complicit and impacted by colonization. Swalwell (2013) reminded us that,

If the hope is that privileged people work to dismantle the systems that unjustly privilege them, then any process working towards such ends is sure to engender a lot of pain, uncertainty, and grief that educators would be wise to acknowledge. (p. 124)

Swalwell (2013) indicated that even students who claim to be “justice oriented” in elite institutions may still find it difficult to recognize how their views are incompatible with the demands of justice. Many of their views continue to “naturalize hierarchy and disembody injustice from individual and structural forms of supremacy” (p. 105). Privileged students are likely to focus on knowledge of injustice rather than understanding its root cause and the connection to their lives (Howard, 2008). As such, the sensitivity and care that educators provide in these spaces will determine the depth to which students from these backgrounds will be willing to engage with these complex and tough realities necessary in growing their own critical consciousness. Swalwell (2013), therefore, deemed students within these schools who position themselves from dominant groups, the most challenging population to attempt this work with.

How can we support students from the dominant culture without re-centering their experiences at the expense of marginalized peoples (Hernandez-Sheets, 2000)? How do teachers leverage the critical consciousness of marginalized groups within the classroom without tokenizing their experience? Ethical questions arise around how far to push these students into emotional discomfort for the purposes of cultivating a critical consciousness. In these spaces, teachers may also grapple with questions around how far to push their students without alienating them, being accused of indoctrination, or losing their jobs (Swalwell, 2013). Gill and White (2013) named these liminal spaces as “transcultural spaces of discomfort” (p. 35). The degree to which independent schools can cultivate a critical consciousness in their student population hinges on their ability to recruit and maintain skilled educators and patient students

who see the world through a critical lens and are willing to navigate these transcultural spaces of discomfort.

If CSP is about the ‘survivance’ of non-dominant cultures, then how do educators within independent schools enact CSP in spaces occupied primarily by those from the dominant culture? The sense that one gets from reading the literature is that the job of raising critical consciousness is an extremely difficult task in the easiest of circumstances, let alone in privileged spaces such as an independent school setting. Regardless of the demographics of these schools, all students can benefit from a pedagogical approach rooted in CSP that aims to raise critical consciousness, build relationships with the land, and centres the cultures of racialized students. While there are many unique challenges and pitfalls in these spaces, I hold strongly to the conviction that we must still try. It is along these lines of logic that I am reminded that our liberation is bound together - settler and Indigenous, black, and white, privileged, and underserved. None of us are free until we are all free (Angelou, 2013).



## Chapter 7: Implications and Possibilities of Decolonial Practices

As I reflect on the journey of writing this dissertation, I am inspired to believe the many lessons I have learned about the process of decolonization in my personal life can, and also, may be, applied to the decolonization of the private institutions. Through this long, arduous, and often painstaking process of self-examination, I have come to learn some important lessons about working towards decolonization. Decolonization will require us to: pause, acknowledge, and be open to listening and learning. It is in a commitment to pausing, acknowledging, and being open to listening and learning that independent schools have a real chance at re-orienting away from reproducing colonialism, and turning towards a process of decolonization.

Patel (2021) aptly argued that “the most explicit decolonial move we can make, at this moment, is to sit still long enough to see clearly what we need to reach beyond. Without pause, it's difficult to ascertain what structures, what inequitable structures, are enlivened by narratives, even perhaps especially the progressive narratives” (p. 88). These words resonate deeply, as through the writing of this dissertation, and the intentional pausing of the fervent equity work in my life, that I have had a chance to examine the colonial narratives that I have long been attached to. Many of these narratives, rooted in hetero-patriarchal racist capitalism, have limited my ability to challenge the people I work with or the racialized communities and institutions within towards material transformation. For institutions, pausing may look and feel different than my personal pause, but it is an initial step that similarly may allow for the creation of space that can lead to new possibilities. Patel (2021) suggested that institutions must put a moratorium on the use of social justice pedagogy and philosophies in school in hopes of lovingly challenging the underlying principles of meritocracy, individualism, and land as property, that have been centered within our society. I would extend this moratorium to independent school

administrators and board directors. In pausing their settlements on land, independent schools will have an opportunity to examine and renegotiate their relationship to the land they are built on and the settler logics that inhabit their classrooms and hallways.

My personal pause has been an opportunity for me to clearly examine the ways by which I was relating to the dominant culture and the racialized communities in my life. Clandinin, Caine and Lesard (2018) explained “slowness” (p. 99) as a fundamental element of listening and living alongside communities. Slowness allows for us to listen in ways that are “the invisible and inaudible enactment of the ethical relation itself” (Lipari, 2014, p. 8). For these reasons, it is important that independent schools begin with a pause, to slow down the processes and protocols that they wish to enact and engage in honest self-facing inquiry that will illuminate gaps and unconscious biases in their thinking. The heart of working through a relational ethic will require a slowness that can only be cultivated if we first come to an immediate halt. What emerges from an intentional pause, is an opportunity to slow down enough to truly listen. What emerges from listening is an opportunity to build a relational ethic with racialized and Indigenous communities. Subsequently, this may lead to possibilities involving reciprocity and mutual respect between these communities. Pausing and slowing down creates a space where we all can become more visible to each other and open new possibilities for relating (Clandinin et al, 2018).

Slowing down and pausing is not a new concept. Rather it has been a part of Indigenous relational pedagogies long before the Western academy began to name it. Elder praxis, as defined by CSP scholars Holmes and Gonzales (2018), is an embodiment that requires slowness, deliberateness, and persistence. The scholars spent time with Lakota elder Rosalie Little Thunder where they learned that “knowing and behaving cannot be teased apart” (p. 212). In the Lakota value system, things such as care, attention to detail, participation, connection, respect,

deliberateness, and discernment are given priority over production, destination, or speed.

Undoubtedly, independent schools, the students, teachers, and administration could learn a great deal from spending more time with Indigenous elders who embody these relational ways of being in the world, a way that can only be embodied through a commitment to slowing down, frequent pausing, and reflection.

Pausing my own social justice endeavours has illuminated the fact that the nature of my teaching practice has largely been informed by colonial logic. These realizations have been the source of a great deal of emotional discomfort. Kumashiro (2002) explained that disrupting the repetitive patterns and narratives in our classrooms can lead to emotional discomfort from our students. What would my work colleagues think if I took a pause from the social justice work with which I strongly identify? What responsibilities do I have to the racialized communities that have benefited from this work? How would independent school administrators feel if they intentionally decided to pause from social justice work?

Kumashiro also drew on the idea that, “Learning in anti-oppressive ways involves unlearning or questioning what students already know. By implication, desiring to learn involves resisting repetition, especially the repetition of what students believe they are supposed to be learning” (p. 73). In a world where rhetoric of social justice education, diversity/equity committees, and affirmative action has hit a fever pitch, many institutions feel they have the blueprint on how to move forward. Taking a pause from this work would allow for a disruption of overused social justice narratives rooted in assumptions of knowing. Institutions and individuals alike, must pause to allow for the new and unknown to emerge. Taking a break from their social justice agendas may cause emotional discomfort from administrators and staff alike. It may also be cause for concern from stakeholders. In my case, taking a pause allowed space for

a deep and critical reflection on my practices. If a pause is used correctly, I imagine it would provide an opportunity for the same. Embodying a decolonial praxis can only begin when both individuals and institutions can sit long enough with their emotional discomfort to pause from the repetitive and familiar colonial narratives.

Secondly, working toward a decolonial praxis will require independent school administrators to acknowledge the ways they have been complicit in promoting and participating in colonial logics that have created a hetero-patriarchal racist society. Battiste (2013) described the cognitive imperialism that takes place within our education system that deems Euro-centric disciplinary knowledge as universal truth. One manifestation of this has been a denial and repression of Indigenous spiritual practices within the education system. Battiste (2013) explained the numerous ways in which education is intimately intertwined with spirit within Indigenous epistemologies. However, within western education systems, these spiritual practices have been relegated to private community gatherings and religious places of worship. In writing this dissertation, I have had the beautiful opportunity to reclaim my own spiritual practice as a sacred element of my teaching and learning journey. Acknowledging the transformative possibilities in a teaching practice that includes nurturing the mind, the body, as well as the spirit has been a big part of my own personal decolonization journey. hooks (1993) asserted that respect and care for the soul and spirit within educational contexts is a necessary condition for learning to take place. Greenwood (2019) posited that the three pillars of decolonization work are: developing a critique of settler colonialism, developing practices that foster continued learning, and “supporting our own learning - in relationship with ourselves, each other, the land, and the cosmos itself” (p. 371). Greenwood referred to the third pillar of decolonization as “soul work” or a “cosmological home-coming”. I would argue that many independent schools, with a

focus on formal curriculum, assessment, and skill development have forgotten this essential element in teaching and learning. Acknowledging the ways in which independent schools have failed to fully address the soul and spirit work within education will allow us to work towards a more, “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994; 2003) that addresses our students more holistically. In addition to the reclamation of my spirituality, I have experienced a transformation in other areas of my life. Over the last three years, I have had to acknowledge the ways in which I have abandoned my personal responsibilities to learn the ancestral knowledge systems carried down through my family. My language. My culture. My family values. Through the writing of this dissertation, I have begun to lovingly confront the pain that has accompanied this personal failure. I imagine that independent school faculty will have to confront their own pain during their process of acknowledgement.

The act of acknowledgment can play an integral role in the healing process for many racialized and Indigenous communities. Since the inception of the western education model, Indigenous epistemologies have been denied as valid forms of knowing and being. Slowly, we as a society, have become, “increasingly aware of the limitations of modern knowledge that have put our collective survival in jeopardy” (Battiste, 2013, p.167). It is through an acknowledgement of our collective wrongdoing and missteps that many racialized and Indigenous communities may find healing and peace. Before we can work towards, what Battiste (2013) called an trans-systemic education system grounded in both Western and Indigenous epistemologies, we must fully acknowledge the ways in which our education system has historically marginalized and disenfranchized Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Patel (2021) claims that part of this acknowledgement process must be about unabashedly confronting settler lies. She states:

When we say their names, when we articulate the histories and contemporary moves of colonization that have been the backbone of this settler nation, we may ruffle feathers. If that outcome is of primary concern, then we are already adrift of any project of transformation. The core purpose of naming the root of violence is to abolish it so that a better society may grow. When we say their names, and work together to think about the complex relationships with land that settler colonialism has created for many populations, we position those very populations, and their relation to each other and the land, as central to the act of agitation. We acknowledge the ways we are indebted to each other, not in terms of money, but in terms of interconnectedness. (p. 155)

For Patel (2021), institutional acknowledgement shows a maturity that an organization is ready to prioritize the telling of truths over the discomfort the truths may cause within the dominant culture. Acknowledgement on an institutional and personal level is about turning towards the damage that has been historically caused by colonialism in the hopes of repair and mending of relationships. If independent schools are serious about decolonization, they will couple their intentional pause with an acknowledgment of their current and historical violence that has been caused to racialized communities within their organizations.

Clandinin, Caine and Lesard (2018) argued that the act of acknowledgement is tethered to the idea of “wakefulness”, in that we can only begin to acknowledge “when we awaken to the ways that our perceptions of things have been shaped by the dominant narratives” (p. 68). As we begin to slowly move alongside racialized communities, we may awaken to the complexity of our and others' experiences. It is through wakefulness that we acknowledge the ways in which we have been complicit in perpetuating injustice. Without a careful attentiveness and commitment to being wakeful, institutions may never be in a position to acknowledge their investments in maintaining the status quo. Clandinin, Caine and Lesard (2018) explained that, “We cannot be fully engaged in our own lives alongside others without working toward wide-awakeness, that awareness of what it is to be in the world, not in some abstract way but in the particulars of the lives being lived... (p. 60). If independent schools wish to truly live alongside

racialized communities, they must commit themselves to the ongoing wide-awakeness of their staff and administration.

I imagine that a thoughtful and meaningful move towards adoption of culturally sustaining pedagogy within the independent school system will play a large part in this crucial step. Paris and Alim (2017) reminded us of the transformative possibilities of culturally sustaining pedagogy in acknowledging and affirming the cultural and linguistic practices of all our students and faculty within the schooling system. For historically marginalized students within the independent school system, a move towards CSP may allow for a critical centering of the cultural practices that have historically sustained racialized communities. In this way, a shift toward culturally sustaining pedagogy becomes a radical act of acknowledgment that may act as a conduit to deep healing for students and faculty within independent schools.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy can be a channel through which acknowledgement and wakefulness can be cultivated by means of a study of cultures. Ladson-Billings (2017) explained that teaching through a CSP lens entails that teachers engage students in meaningful projects that ensure that, “students remain firmly grounded in their culture of origin while acquiring knowledge and skill in at least one additional culture”. As faculty and students begin to broaden their cultural repertoires and develop fluency in multiple cultures, they can become more wakeful to the ways that power and privilege operate in their lives. In turn, the opportunity is created for students to develop a critical consciousness, a key element of CSP. Ladson-Billings asserted that this process is also very relevant to upper middle class white students who claim they “do not have a culture”. She argued that, “due to social power dynamics that define whiteness as the norm, they are like fish who have trouble seeing the water that they swim in” (p. 145). Working towards a wakefulness in spaces that are predominantly occupied by members of

the dominant culture may require skilled educators who can navigate the challenges of unpacking the loaded concepts of power and privilege.

As I write this final chapter of my dissertation, I am inspired to reflect on the recent Papal visit to Alberta, in which Pope Francis finally acknowledged and apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in the forced assimilation and genocide of Aboriginal peoples across Canada. Although contentious and hotly debated, the visit has also posed interesting questions for me. How can we tell when an institution has performed this step honestly and authentically? I imagine that this step must be accompanied by meaningful action that demonstrates the repairing of relationships. Listening to racialized and Indigenous communities will provide important feedback for what actions must be taken to repair those relationships. Battiste (2013) argued that acknowledgement is a key element of constitutional reconciliation between the Canadian education system and Indigenous peoples across this nation and must include such things as acknowledging and affirming treaty rights, Aboriginal teachings, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Similarly, Tuck and Yang (2012), advanced that institutions wishing to move toward decolonization must acknowledge that decolonization will require a radical change in the order of the world that will require, “repatriation of stolen land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and dismantling of the imperial metropole” (p. 31). Regardless of how one measures and defines the act of acknowledgment, independent schools will have to be open to receiving feedback from racialized communities. This will require acknowledging the need for listening and learning, before there is change consistent with decolonization.

Lastly, it will be imperative that the faculty of independent schools be open to listening and learning from racialized communities in the process towards decolonization. Clandinin,



Caine and Lessard (2018) explained that listening “is the invisible and inaudible enactment of the ethical relation itself; upon it, everything depends” (p. 94). For independent schools, this will require a deeper commitment to the listening to the voices of racialized faculty and students. This may take the form of formalized feedback through equity surveys, greater representation on committees, and individual conversations with willing participants. It will be crucial that both administrators and educators navigate listening with the intent to centre the voice and experiences of racialized people with extreme care. Without the direct intention to carve out spaces for the listening to voices of racialized communities, independent schools may find themselves repeating old patterns of centring whiteness. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy offers the model of “sacred truth spaces” (Paris & Alim, 2018, p. 102). Sacred Truth Spaces encourages students to engage in critical listening and voicing that, “might feel uncomfortable and unsafe, but have the potential to be affirming and life-changing for all involved” (p. 102). The goal of these spaces is to centre student’s ability to share their realities and experiences that challenge the standard knowledge imbued by the dominant culture that often leads to the painful silencing of historically marginalized peoples. The concept of sacred truth spaces is grounded in a relational ethic that lends itself to humanizing dialogue in the service of the co-creation of a sacred truth, “where meaning is made between our stories because of – and not in spite of - our differences” (p. 103).

In tandem with listening must be a commitment to learning. Patel (2021) explained that inherent in study will be struggle as, “society cannot change without struggle, and that struggle is susceptible to the kindling of appeasement that might burn but provides no heat or light” (p. 168). As independent schools grapple with the various tensions inherent in moving towards decolonization, they must resist the urge to water down their efforts to protect the feelings of the

dominant culture. Inevitably, there will be pressure from stakeholders that are invested in recentring the colonial agenda. Administrators will have to learn to navigate the tensions involved in centring the voices and experiences of racialized communities over the dominant culture. This may take a great deal of resources in the form of training and skill development.

Patel (2021) goes on to explicate the types of things that institutions must unlearn as part of their study. “Liberation requires that we unknow many falsehoods that are foundational to settler colonialism: categories of human and non-human, land as inert, health as a luxury for a few, the pillaging of the planet and its darker people as the “natural” order of things (p. 168). She asks that institutions release what they already know to step into the unknown as an act of solidarity. Clandinin, Caine and Lessard (2018) stated that living with uncertainty is a core principle of living within a relationally ethical framework as it requires people and institutions to navigate a liminal space that may cause dis/ease. It requires institutions to resist the desire to plan and predict outcomes which can result in a closing of possibilities. As independent schools move towards a decolonial praxis, they will find themselves in the midst of a generative unknown, a place of infinite possibility that will require a rootedness in their hearts and intuition, rather than their minds and rationality. This openness to uncertainty will require that administrators and educators move away from the idea that norms and rules are sacred, so that they can lead with imagination, curiosity, and presence (Clandinin et al. (2018). Dominguez (2017) argued that culturally sustaining pedagogy espouses the values of uncertainty as it requires teacher educators with little experience outside of Western epistemologies and ontologies to step outside their comfort zone and invite local communities into their classroom. Using a CSP approach would foreground alternative cultural epistemologies to meet the pedagogical needs of racialized students and faculty within their classrooms.

Through the writing of this dissertation, I have come to understand the intersections of decolonization and relational ethics more deeply. I have become painfully awake to the ways in which coloniality has inculcated my mind, body, and soul. Now, I must attend to the ways in which I will choose to depart from this study while continuing to navigate towards decolonization. How do I leave this study in a good way? What responsibilities do I have to myself and the others who have played a part in this journey? What responsibilities do I have to the institutions that are hoping to continue on a similar journey? There is a bit of trepidation as I think about what is next for me. Now that I am departing this study, I am left with questions about how to meaningfully and sustainably embody the things that I've learned.

The person completing the writing of this dissertation now feels radically different than the person who began this work. He feels more connected to his inner knowing, more connected to the land, to humans and the more-than-humans who inhabit it. I am feeling a responsibility to connect more deeply with the land that I was born on, a land that my family once left in search of material opportunity. My heart is being called to connect with my ancestral spiritual traditions and avail the knowledge systems that have sustained my family lineage since time immemorial. I am leaving this study with a renewed connection to prayer as a means of communing with the creator. Also, I am leaving this study with an unrelenting desire to relearn my mother tongue: Hindi. I feel affirmed in my commitment to begin the process of decolonization with the self. As I know that I cannot speak about decolonization of institutions until I have begun that process in my own life. Ultimately, I feel called to continue his work after the formal commitments of research have been completed. Perhaps this is what it means to live by a relational ethic - to feel responsible beyond the scope of the imposed bureaucracy.

Time and time again, throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have felt the presence of various ancestors with me. My nani, My dada. My dadi. Some whom I've never met. They have been guiding my journey and blessing it with their prayers. I feel connected to them in a way that I never have before. This has been nothing short of a spiritual journey, in which I have come to reclaim the parts of self that have been long abandoned. It has been a ceremonial homecoming, and my ancestors have been waiting for me at the door. As I have unlocked my ancestral wisdom, it feels like for the first time in a long time, my place in the world is clear. I am home.

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## Appendix A

### Ethics Informed Consent Form

**Name of Researchers:**

Dr. Marlon Simmons (Principal Investigator)  
Suhail Panjwani (Doctoral Candidate)

**Title of Project**

I am inviting you to take part in a research study exploring the narratives of racialized faculty within independent schools across Western Canada. The Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

**Purpose of the Study**

Canada as a nation has developed a cultural identity that ostensibly espouses the values of equity diversity and inclusion (Dei, 2005). Despite this purported identity, we continue to see deficits in representation for racialized peoples within school curriculum, policy, and teaching workforce. Independent schools, given their exclusivity, may be institutions where these issues of representation and equity are exacerbated for racialized faculty. There is very little information regarding:

- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within the independent school system contributed to their understanding of race?
- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within independent schools informed their understanding of power dynamics and privilege in the school system?

**What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

By agreeing to participate in this study, you will have the opportunity to take part in one of the following activities:

- ✓ A series of 3 interviews over the course of 4 months that share insights on the experiences of racialized faculty within the independent school system.

In taking part in this study, your participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate altogether, and you may withdraw from the study without penalty. The deadline to have your data withdrawn from this study will be two weeks after you provide consent.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected**

You will be asked to share your personal narrative as a racialized faculty within the private education system. Furthermore, you will be asked to consider the ways in which your professional experiences within independent schools have informed your understanding of racial politics. Finally, participants will be asked to recall ways in which their racialized identity is reflected in the policy, curriculum, and culture within the independent school they work at.

No one other than the research team will have access to the data from the interviews or the recordings from the individual interviews. The recordings will never be used in any public setting. However, transcripts of our discussions, anonymized by using a pseudonym, may appear in peer-reviewed academic journals and academic conference presentations.

### **Are There Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

Although there are no known major risks in this study, you may be asked to recall sensitive experiences as a racialized faculty within independent schools.

I hope that the results of this research will add to an understanding of the racialized person's experience within independent schools and bring about material change within the independent school system.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The research data will be kept in secure digital storage accessible only to the researcher team. The confidential, aggregated data will be stored for five years on a password encrypted computer, after which time, it will be permanently erased.



## Consent

By checking the boxes below, you agree that you (1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and (2) agree to participate in this research. You are free to discontinue your participation in this research at any time during the study up until two weeks after you provide consent.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time up until two weeks after giving consent. You should feel free to ask for clarification throughout your participation in this study.

*“I wish to volunteer to participate in three 60 minute individual interviews via a password protected Zoom link”* [Yes/No CHECK BOX]

Contact email address to arrange interview time: [suhailpanjwani@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suhailpanjwani@ucalgary.ca)

### Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research, please contact Suhail Panjwani at [suhailpanjwani@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suhailpanjwani@ucalgary.ca) or Dr. Marlon Simmons at [simmonsm@ucalgary.ca](mailto:simmonsm@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you’ve been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Thank you for considering participating in this research.

Sincerely,  
Suhail Panjwani, Ed.D. (Cand.)  
University of Calgary  
Werklund School of Education

## Appendix B

### Letter of Initial Contact

Dear Participant,

You are receiving this email on behalf of Suhail Panjwani, a doctoral student from the University of Calgary. Should you be interested in learning more about the study or if you have any questions, please feel free to write to me at [suhail.panjwani@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suhail.panjwani@ucalgary.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research study titled, *The Experiences of Racialized Faculty Within the Independent School System*. The purpose of the study is to explore the narratives and experiences of racialized faculty within independent schools in Alberta.

The qualitative study examines the following research questions:

- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within the independent school system contributed to their understanding of race?
- How have the professional experiences of racialized teachers within independent schools informed their understanding of power dynamics and privilege in the school system?

If you are interested in participating, the study involves 3 individual interviews approximately 45-60 minutes long, regarding your experiences of being a racialized faculty at an independent school.

You may refuse to participate in the study altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer all questions, and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board - REB.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your name, age, and email address upon which, a consent form will be sent to you to sign. If you give your consent to participate in the interviews, please sign the form and return within two (2) weeks of receipt of this letter.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

**Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research, please contact Suhail Panjwani or Marlon Simmons (contact information provided below).

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study (REB21-1554).

The investigator will maintain a copy of the consent form.

Thank you for considering participating in this research

## Appendix C

### Semi-structured Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me about your experiences as a racialized student in the education system?
- 2) Tell me about your experiences as a racialized adult in the independent school system?
- 3) How have your experiences as a racialized faculty within the independent school system informed your understanding of race?
- 4) What were some of the reasons you decided to work in the independent school system?
- 5) Do you perceive your identity markers as an element of conflict or empowerment among dominant viewpoints in the school system?
- 6) Has there been a supportive network in your experiences that has helped you in your teaching career?
- 7) How do you identify yourself in your work environment and/or personal relations?
- 8) How does your racialized identity play a role in staff and/or student relations in your experiences?