Negotiating “Brown”:
Youth Identity Formations in The Greater Toronto Area

By
Ayla Raza

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
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*Youth In The Greater Toronto Area*

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**Abstract**

This study problematizes the notion of a Canadian identity that is constructed within the framework of liberal multiculturalism. The primary goal of this study is to explore how a racial identity of “Brown” is conceptualized, expressed, and negotiated in the Euro-centered White space of schools. To do this, I interview five 1.5-generation immigrant youth from the Greater Toronto Area who self-identify as “Brown.”

This study finds that “Brown” is a fluid, multi-layered identity that is expressed differently in different contexts. Further, “Brown” youth use the identifier of “Brown” as a way to make space for their identities because “Brown” experiences are silenced in the Black/White binary in which racial conversations take place. Moreover, this study finds that although “Brown” youth encounter racism in school, they rationalize these acts. Finally, “Brown” youth invoke the hyphenated identities of “Brown-Canadian” and “South Asian-Canadian” to navigate the contradiction of being “Brown” and being “Canadian.”
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“[I]t is only through unveiling the truth about reality that one can come to a critical understanding of the present and learn what needs to be done for the future.”

When I moved from Pakistan to Canada at the age of nine, I was not aware of the power and significance of skin colour or race. To me, everyone in Pakistan was just Pakistani. In Canada, however, aspects of my identity were separated and scrutinized. I remember being asked: What are you? Where are your grandparents from? What religion are you? What kind of Muslim? What language(s) do you speak? Such questions gestured towards a dichotomy that is present in Canadian realities, mainly the reoccurring theme of what is and is not “Canadian.” Historical discourses, such as those found in school textbooks, have (re-)constructed the dominant narrative of “Canada.” This historical narrative is told from the perspective of European explorers and their settlement of Canada, and it is presented as if it is objective and factual. Within the dominant narrative, then, “Canadianness” is a Euro-centred Whiteness that embodies the meaning of what it means to be “Canadian.” Moreover, this racialization of “Canadian” carries within it a Black/White racial binary which invites those present in the Canadian nation-state to identify with one or the other end of that binary. As a Brown immigrant, I often felt stuck inside this Black/White racial framework, unable to articulate my own identifications.

Using a phenomenological approach including one-on-one interviews with youth who self-identify as “Brown,” this study finds that such feelings and experiences are shared by other South Asian immigrants who were brought to Canada at an early age. The study explores the construction and navigation of such “Brown” identities in the

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1 Nicholas (2001, p. 11, using Friere, 1983) writes in the context of Native peoples and (colonial) education.
Canadian context focusing especially on the ways in which South Asian youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) articulate and negotiate the racial and racialized landscapes of the Canadian national space. Along the way, this study situates “Brown” identities within Birk’s (2009) work, thus using “Brown” as “a political classification” that recognizes that many who are enfolded into this classification may not feel connections to South Asia (p. 4).

Drawing upon critical race theory, Whiteness studies, critical Canadian studies, and a more recent body of knowledge on the meanings of “Brownness,” this study links self-identifications as “Brown” to the workings of White supremacy and a concomitant racial binary in Canada, where all that is perceived as non-White is marked as “Black.” Further, curriculum and educational practice also reproduces stereotypes of “South Asian culture” that mark the young people interviewed in this study and their communities as outsiders and the “Other” of a Canadian identity that is attached to racial Whiteness and European civilization. Yet the young people who participated in this study locate themselves against and outside this binary imagination to articulate “Brown” identities as a claim to being “Canadian” as well.

**Background**

Canada’s population has been growing steadily in recent years, and much of the growth is a result of immigration. In fact, one in five people are born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada 2011, 2013; Statistics Canada, May 2013). Between 2006 and 2011, 1.2 million immigrants came to Canada (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey...
Of these immigrants, 78% were non-White\(^2\) (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011; Statistics Canada, May 2013). Further, there is a tendency for immigrants to settle either in or around urban centres,\(^3\) the most populous of which are Toronto’s Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), Montreal’s CMA, and Vancouver’s CMA (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2011). In Ontario, for example, seven out of 10 immigrants live in Toronto (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011, 2013; Statistics Canada, May 2013, p. 10). Specifically, the GTA, that attracts many newcomers, consists of the City of Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, and Markham,\(^4\) all of which have a large percentage of non-White populations (see Appendix A).

South Asians have been the largest group of visible minorities in Canada since 2006 (see Appendix B); hence it is prudent that research begins to address and bring to light their voices, lived experiences, and realities. Given that many South Asian immigrants are second- or third-generation immigrants (See Appendix C) (Statistics Canada, May 2013), this study focuses specifically on 1.5-generation, or individuals who were born outside of Canada and who moved to Canada before the age of 13. This is around the age when a student begins high school, which is arguably a vastly different experience than that of junior school. Moreover, South Asian youth comprise a

\(^2\) Statistics Canada uses the term “visible minority,” which it defines using the Employment Equity Act: visible minority refers to “‘persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.’” (Statistics Canada, 2008). Under this definition, regulations specify the following groups as visible minorities: Chinese, South Asians, Blacks, Arabs, West Asians, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, Japanese, Koreans and other visible minority groups, such as Pacific Islanders” (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/defdemo53a-eng.htm). However, this particular study uses the term “non-White” because it utilizes an anti-racism entry point.

\(^3\) Over 62.5% of the 1.2 million immigrants between 2006 and 2011 settled in one of three CMAs of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011, 2013; Statistics Canada, May 2013).

\(^4\) The combined population of these four cities account for 74.4% of Toronto’s CMA population.
significant percentage of public school students in the GTA\textsuperscript{5}, and it is their identity formations and racial experiences as “Canadian” yet “Brown” that this study explores by utilizing personal interviews with five 1.5-generation youth between the ages of 16 and 19, who live in the GTA and self-identify as “Brown.”

The purposes of this study are two-fold. First, it examines how notions and constructions of “Brown” are articulated in everyday youth vernaculars. Second, this study seeks to provide a discursive space for the voices of youth who identify as Brown. Thus, the key research questions are: Who are the youth who identify as “Brown” in the GTA, and how do they understand themselves? More specifically, how do they understand and articulate themselves in terms of race? How are these “Brown” articulations related to experiences and discourses couched within the Black/White binary that organizes dominant conversations about race in Canada? Moreover, of particular interest to this study are the narratives of “Brown” youth in the context of education and how they negotiate their identities in schools: as non-White bodies, how do they experience schools and education, which is steeped in the worldviews, value systems, and needs of what scholars have theorized as Euro-centred Whiteness?

This study therefore highlights the ways in which self-identified “Brown” youth in public schools in the GTA utilize discourses of “Brownness” to resist these curricular and educational practices that make the complex and temporal identity formations and forms of social life that define their Canadian realities impossible and invisible. This study calls for public schools and educational practices that make space for this

\textsuperscript{5} See for example the 2011 TDSB report, \textit{Portraits of major ethno-racial groups in Toronto} as found in Navaratnam (2011).
complexity, including the lived experiences, vernaculars, and cultures of Brown youth in Canada.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

There is a vast body of literature that explores who belongs to a “Canadian nation,” and the public school system is an extension of these discussions of belonging; it utilizes unproblematic notion of multiculturalism and tends to depict Canada as an all-embracing space that is free from racial tensions. Public education in Ontario revolves around knowledges and practices generated from within the privileged racial position where White, middle-class experiences and worldviews present themselves as universal and “Canadian” (see Nicholas, 2001; Shariff, 2008; Lund & Carr, 2010; Dei, 1996; Henry & Tator, 2009; Chan, 2007). Moreover, like public education, the mass media in Canada constructs cultural discourses in which the norm of Eurocentric Whiteness is rarely questioned because it is viewed “as [a] natural or normative point…of reference” (Solorzano & Yesso, 2002, p. 28).

**A Canadian Identity**

Henry et al. (2000) argue that racial categories in Canada are (re-)constructed and organized hierarchically in relation to normative Euro-centred Whiteness; this formation privileges Whites, men, the upper/middle class, heterosexuals, and the able-bodied. Whiteness is thus an invisible category of privilege upon which opportunities and benefits are conferred, and it is “an ethnocentric notion that 'allows one to think and speak as if Whiteness describe[s] and define[s] the world’” (p. 299, quoted in Samuel, 2000).

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6 See Peggy McIntosh (1989) for a list of practical day-to-day examples of how White supremacy is enacted.
Accordingly, the Canadian identity is constructed as an identity of Whiteness because it is the norm in society; the ideas and beliefs that underscore a Canadian identity inform common understandings of what it means to be “Canadian.” Accordingly, notions of being “Brown” are constructed within and in reaction to a White Canadian racial formation. Hence, this study understands race as a social construct which shapes people’s everyday life experiences in powerful ways (Miles and Torres, 1996), and it is against this backdrop that the “Brown” identities articulated by the participants in this study are presented as counter narratives to both normative Whiteness and “Canadianness.”

“Experiences”

To explore an articulation of “Brown” identities and their formation, this study utilizes a theoretical paradigm that revolves around a specific understanding of experience and experiential knowledge. This paper draws on Scott’s (1991) theorization of “experience,” specifically the idea that “subjects…are constituted through experience” (p. 779). This paper further utilizes Foucault’s (1980) notions of power and knowledge broadly to trouble the dichotomies such as dominant/subjugated knowledge or experiential knowledge/objective knowledge. This study takes the position that everything is relational. Hence, subjugated and dominant knowledges inform one another. Furthermore, this paper adheres to the notion that there is a “plurality of objective truths and [it is impossible to speak] from a position that lies outside of social and cultural relations (Dawney, 2011, p. 17); In other words, a one-way, linear, top-down relationship between knowledges and experiences does not exist. In this sense, “Brown”
identities are constituted simultaneously by the knowledges that permeate and define social life and individuals’ subjective experiences.

**The Context: Canadian Multiculturalism**

Canada prides itself on being one of the only two countries in the world that has an official multicultural policy, and this notion of an accepting and tolerant multicultural nation comprises an integral part of individual and collective Canadian identities and experiences. Canadians are constantly exposed to the idea of Canada as a nation that is accepting and embracing of diversity and difference. For example, the state policy on multiculturalism is engrained in the *Constitution Act, 1982*\(^7\), multiculturalism is a cultural narrative, and multiculturalism is also an educational directive. Thus, multiculturalism seeps into every aspect of social life and shapes personal experiences. However, the *Multicultural Act* has been criticized since its inception as official policy in 1971, when it was created in a rush because of political unrest in Canada. For example, Bissoondath (1993) notes that

> the act appears to indulge in several unexamined assumptions: that people, coming here from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before the exoticism of the foreign (p. 372).

Thus, when the *Act* was passed, the Canadian government did not give importance to “unity or oneness of vision.” Rather, “[i]ts provisions seem aimed…at encouraging division” (p. 373).

The division that can be found in the *Multicultural Act* refers to continuous racial inequality and discrimination in Canada, where distribution of economic and political

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\(^7\) Section 27 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* states that, “This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”
privileges continue to benefit racial Whiteness. Thus, on the one hand, Canadian multiculturalism puts forth a myth of Canada as a nation that is characterized by tolerance, that embraces diversity, and as a nation of peacekeepers. On the other hand, however, racism persists. As scholars observe, “new racism” in Canada (Navaratnam, 2011) is experienced in covert acts of everyday exclusion and marginalization (Essed, 1991), it is cloaked in cultural narratives (Abbas, 2007) and it is present in every aspect of Canadian society (Henry & Tator, 2006). This study observes the self-articulations of “Brown” identities in the midst of this contradiction of a benign and accepting Canadian state where everyday racial practices and experiences bespeak Canadian realities that are governed by the ideals and epistemologies of European colonialism and racism.

**Methodology**

“...students are not ‘disembodied’ individuals but...their background and identities are implicated in the schooling and learning processes...”

This study analyzes schools as a site where official discourses on racial and national identity meet experiential knowledges of “Brown” youth, for which an integrative anti-racism framework is appropriate because of the need to conceptualize “race.” First, anti-racism engages with a Foucauldian (1980) understanding of power, where power is dispersed through specific logics and tactics (i.e. racism) and these logics and tactics cannot be linked to a specific institution or group of people. Second, integrative anti-racism is critical of institutions in society, such as schools, and their complicity in maintaining and further perpetuating inequities based on layers of identification, such as race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation (Dei, 1996). Third, integrative anti-racism unmask...
racism and race-based prejudice that are inherent to the social organization of Canada’s colonial and White supremacist society. Finally, an integrative anti-racism framework hears and validates experiential knowledges, which are used as an entry point for analyzing societal institutions and their perpetuation of systemic racism, as well as other discriminations (see Appendix D). Integrative anti-racism thus informs the analysis of this study, while a phenomenological approach structures the methods used for data collection.

**Approach: Phenomenology**

This study was designed using a phenomenological approach where race is understood as a social construct that is a part of individual and social perceptions and imagination, yet that has real effects. Accordingly, to explore the racial identity of “Brownness,” it is necessary to speak to and hear the voices of those who identify as “Brown.” Such an exploration of the ways in which racial identities come to be calls for a phenomenological approach, which is best suited to probe into these identifications. As Lester (1999) explains, “[t]he purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, [and] to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in the situation” (p. 1). Furthermore, to illuminate these individual experiences, this study utilized one-on-one semi-structured interviews with youth who identify as “Brown” (see Appendix E).

Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are useful for this approach because such methods allow for ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) and because the results are represented as the perspectives of the participants, thus giving insight into participants’ lived realities (Newton, 2010). In addition to being cognizant of hesitations, silences, and
other non-verbal responses, being face-to-face with participants provided me, the researcher, with the opportunity to observe body language, which is especially important when discussing ‘politically incorrect’ topics or topics that trigger trauma or produce hesitations and/or anxieties within. Thus, I was attentive to body language and what is not said or the manner in which things are said because it gave me additional insight than words alone.

Design: Phases

For the purpose of building an academic and practical context around the perceived and/or experienced identity of youth “Brownness” in the GTA, specifically in relation to education, this study uses various data collection strategies to collect and analyze primary and secondary data. I performed initial research for this study by conducting database searches based on the following key terms: Brown (youth/identities); high school/teenagers; race/racism/racialization; education/school; Canada/Ontario/Greater Toronto Area.

Primary data collection strategies include interviews and analyzing government documents and school- and education-related data. These primary data were complemented and informed by extensive research of secondary sources, primarily scholarship on the subject of race and identity formation across sociology, race studies, education policy, and immigration. Moreover, this study used the parameters of race, racism, anti-racism, equity, immigration/migration, and demographics to peruse government documents. The government documents used in this study include Ministry of Education documents, Citizenship and Immigration Canada documents, multicultural policies, and census reports.
Further, after recruiting participants to interview, neighbourhood specific, school specific, and school board specific secondary research was conducted with the goal of gaining familiarity with socio-political demographics. The secondary research allowed this study to identify existing literature within the research topic, it aided in understanding key terms as they are discussed in the literature, and it also brought attention to prominent studies that have been conducted in this, or in closely related, topics of interest. From here, gaps in the existing research, as they relate to the experiences of “Brown” youth in schooling in the GTA, were ascertained. All of this facilitated the refinement of research questions based on themes that were found in the literature. Once this research was grounded within the existing bodies of scholarly works, I conducted five semi-structure one-on-one in-depth interviews to attain primary data.

Participants

Participants were chosen using criterion sampling, and they were recruited through snowballing and through personal connections. Criterion sampling is a method of sampling in which participants are chosen based upon predetermined criteria (Russell & Gregory, 2003). Participants of this study were between the ages of 16 and 19, self-identified as Brown, and were 1.5 generation immigrants (see Appendix F). The participants moved to Canada in 1997, 1999, 1999, 2006, and 2007 respectively, and they came from two geographical locations that are both situated in the GTA. I interviewed five participants. Throughout the study three of them are referred to as “Participant 1,” “Participant 2,” and “Participant 3,” while the others chose to be referred to as “Batman”

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9 Given the limited scope of this research (due to it being a Master’s thesis), it would have been ideal if participants were from one school because they would share the school environment and would likely live in the same neighbourhood. This would have made it easier to explore individual differences. However, such homogeneity was not possible, as is explained in this section.
and “Aang.” I made the decision to use numbers instead of names for the three participants who were given pseudonyms because of the stereotypes associated with names and the politics of naming: Should the pseudonyms be ethnic names? How will the pseudonyms affect how this work is read?

Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 attended Inner Suburb High School (hereafter called ISHS), which is located in an inner suburb of Toronto. This inner suburb has a large non-White population, with 80% of its population composed of non-Whites (Rubinfeld, 2013). Moreover, 21.5% of the approximately 130,000 people that live in this area are South Asian. Further, this inner suburb has been categorized as one of the 13 “priority neighbourhoods” in the City of Toronto. Moreover, the unemployment rate in this area is 18%, which is three times the City of Toronto’s average unemployment rate. As a result of the aforementioned factors, there has been a mass movement of people from this inner suburb to outer suburbs. Given this movement from inner suburbs to outer suburbs, interviewing Batman and Aang, who are both from an outer suburb, is appropriate.

The outer suburb where Batman and Aang live is heavily populated by a diverse number of self-identified minorities (see Appendix G). Similar to the inner suburb then, this outer suburb is majority non-White, with a diverse population of self-

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10 Participant 1 is a 16 year-old female who immigrated to Canada at the age of 10.
11 Participant 2 is a 16 year-old male who immigrated to Canada at the age of 1 or 2.
12 Participant 3 is an 18 year-old male who immigrated to Canada at the age of 1 or 2.
13 To protect the identities of participants, all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.
14 This study defines an inner suburb as a community that is located in close proximity to a large city, such as downtown Toronto.
15 The City of Toronto defines “priority neighbourhoods” as “areas with extensive poverty and without many social and community services” (Hulchanski, 2007, p. 10).
16 This study defines an outer suburb as a community that is located at a distance from a large city such as downtown Toronto.
17 Batman is a 19 year-old male who immigrated to Canada at the age of 12.
18 Aang is a 17 year-old male who immigrated to Canada between the ages of 3 and 5.
identified minorities. An important difference to note, however, is that this outer suburb is not considered a “priority neighbourhood.” A further difference between participants from the inner suburb and participants from the outer suburb is related to the schools they attended. Both Batman and Aang attended specialized high schools, while Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 attended their local high school. Batman has recently graduated from a program for academically gifted students, and Aang attended a program for musically gifted students. It is important to note that Batman’s neighbourhood high school housed a program for academically gifted students, so he attends his area high school, while Aang did not attend his area high school.

Data Collection (Interviewing) And Analysis

All five interviews for this study were conducted in spaces that were familiar to the individual participants and that guaranteed privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix H). Participants were interviewed only once, and on average, interviews lasted for approximately one hour. Also, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (See Appendix I). Prior to conducting interviews, key guiding questions were designed and were made available to participants (see Appendix J). The key guiding questions for

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19 Teachers, guidance counselors, and/or parents generally stream students toward such programs from as early as elementary school. Also, students must apply to gain admission, and sometimes they also have to pass an admissions test.

20 It is usually the case that students do not attend their area high school when they apply to “specialized” programs because not all high schools offer specialized programs. There are a large variety of “specialized” programs that are offered by school boards. While the specifications are not exactly the same across school boards, all school boards offer programs for the academically gifted, the artistically gifted, special needs students, and so on. For more information, see the following:
  http://www.tdsb.on.ca/HighSchool/GoingtoHighSchool/SpecializedSchoolsandPrograms.aspx
  http://www.peelschools.org/parents/programs/secondary/Pages/default.aspx
the interviews were grouped thematically, and their purpose was to act as prompts if required during interviews (Newton, 2010).^21^ A possible limitation of this study’s research design has to do with providing participants with key guiding questions prior to the interviews. This is because participants’ responses could have been pre-determined, which would have circumvented an “honest” conversation, and would instead have resulted in a performative conversation. I, however, do not see this as a limitation in this study. Everything we do is performative; we *choose* to emphasize specific aspects of our identity based on the goal(s) of an interaction. Also, the key guiding questions were used as a loose guide, and they were based upon themes that are being explored in this study, such as Brownness, identity, schooling experiences, race and racism, and multiculturalism. Further, the length of each interview varied and questions/comments made by me, the researcher, were framed differently in each interview.

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them verbatim and then analyzed them. First, the transcripts were open coded, as this brought attention to the descriptive and analytical themes present in *what* the participants said and in *how* they said it. Then, transcripts were focused coded based on big themes that were identified. They were focused coded to identify reoccurring themes, to unpack statements with the goal of identifying layers of meaning, and to see connections between sub-themes. Thus, I observed patterns in the data, which were organized into conceptual frameworks, and I then further challenged and explored the conceptual frameworks (Russell & Gregory, 2003). The purpose of this back-and-forth between data analysis and data collection was

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^21^ Also, participants had a copy of key guiding questions prior to the interview. This was done to exhibit transparency and to aid participants’ in feeling comfortable, which is important to fostering in-depth interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
to minimize the likelihood of conducting a weak and misguided analysis as well as to ensure that this research is accurately situated within the existing body of scholarly works.

In order to analyze the data gathered, I identified reoccurring themes, concepts, and issues. These concepts, themes, and issues were identified based on what was salient to the participants (if it continued to be spoken about and brought up by a participant, if a participant had strong reactions or a lot to say about something, or if they directly expressed the importance of something), what was said or felt by most of the participants, and what stood out (something that challenged the existing literature or that supported the existing literature). Finally, to corroborate key findings and validate the data and subsequent analysis, the process of data triangulation was used. Primarily, theory triangulation was used, which “is a process whereby emergent findings are examined in relation to existing social science theories” (Russell & Gregory, 2003).

**Main Arguments**

This study argues that “Brown” is not a monolithic identity as it is composed of a multitude of layers and it has different meanings to different people. Moreover, the nature and the significance of “Brown” identities changes as the context in which they are expressed and negotiated changes. Further, participants’ surrounding environments affected how they were constructed and expressed themselves. Finally, this study finds that there is a contradiction between being “Canadian” and being “Brown.”

While all five participants spoke about personal experiences that they described as racist, and while they believed that racism does exist in Canada, they all maintained the
position that racism does not exist in their schools. This study analyzes this reoccurring theme within the notion of “Canadianness” framed within Euro-centred Whiteness; despite Canada’s multicultural policies, initiatives, and narratives on inclusion and diversity, what it means to be a “true Canadian” continues to be defined and perceived as being racially White. Resisting and negotiating this dominant formation, participants utilized the notion of hyphenated identities, such as “Brown-Canadian” and “South Asian-Canadian.”

These hyphenated identities demonstrate the complexity, fracturing and negotiation of the participants’ identities. For example, the majority of them gravitated towards these hyphenated selves to make space for “Brownness” and to navigate the contradiction of being “Canadian” and being “Brown.” Thus, participants also asserted hyphenated identities, such as “Brown-Canadian,” to bespeak a sense of connection to South Asia (i.e. clothing, language, cuisine, values).

Accordingly, “Brown” becomes a signifier for a complex identity formation in which youth maintain knowledge, relationship, and emotional attachment to notions of South Asia, while also claiming a “Canadian” identity. The idea of belonging to “Brownness” while also claiming “Canadianness” demonstrates the ambiguity of a “Brown” identity for youth in the GTA. Furthermore, this work suggests that identification with a hyphenated identity is not a result of the “Brown” youth seamlessly embracing both a “Canadian” identity and a “Brown” identity. Rather, the use of hyphenated identities is to chart the binary between the two identities and also to unpack the difficulty in feeling both. This difficulty stems from the realities of the Black/White
binary that organizes cultural and educational narratives in Canada yet that do not leave room for the articulation of anything in-between or outside.

**Significance**

This study builds upon and extends scholarship on the meanings of racialized “Brownness” in Canada (and beyond) by asserting an understudied aspect of this complex reality, mainly the negotiation of race and what it means to be “Canadian” as lived personal experience (see Sayani, 2010; Sundar, 2008; Shariff, 2008; Samuel, 2004; Ngo, 2006; Navaratnam, 2011; Abbas, 2007; Guney, 2007; Kilbride, M., et al., 2001; Desi & Subramanian, 2000; Frost, 2010; Sumartojo, 2012; Maira, 2002). Although students of South Asian descent comprise the largest non-White student body in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (Navaratnam, 2011), there is a dearth of research on this subject position; it continues to be unrecognized and underexplored in a Canadian context. This study adds to the literature on South Asian immigrants in the Canadian education system, thus working to lessen this gap. Moreover, scholars acknowledge that there is a difference between the experiences of first-generation immigrants and second-generation immigrants (see Sundar, 2008), which necessitates research on different experiences, including those of 1.5-generation South Asian immigrants.

Additionally, this study allows for further understandings of identities by adding to the limited literature that is available on “Brownness” in Canada, and specifically in the GTA and within the context of Canadian education. This study deepens our understanding of the identification of “Brown” and the notion of “Brownness” by arguing for the category of “Brown” on the premise that it is how South Asian youth in the GTA
understand, define, and express themselves. Moreover, this study contributes to the body of literature on “Brownness” and schooling because it connects “Brown” youth’s identities and public education spaces, thus also contributing to our understanding of how socio-cultural location and context affects the making and meanings of being “Brown.” Therefore, this study extends our knowledge and deepens our understanding of how “Brown” identities come to be, particularly in urban settings. This allows for a further understanding of race relations and identity formation in contemporary Canada.

Finally, this study enters the conversation on the critiques of multiculturalism and adds to that literature by showing that identities of “Brownness” are informed by racial marginalization and exclusion. This is in line with scholars who have demonstrated the racism that underlies narratives and policies on multiculturalism as well as the norm of Euro-centred Whiteness that underlies educational textbooks and practices. Hence, this study enters into the discussion about the meaning of multiculturalism in Canada as it continues to expand the highly developed and extensive body of literature on Canadian multiculturalism.

**Overview Of Chapters**

Chapter two reviews the literature on the concept of race and the formation of racial identities to explore the context in which “Brown” identities are conceptualized and articulated. This discussion is situated within the specific Canadian context, which is characterized by the discourse of multiculturalism. Accordingly, I unpack the notion of a “tolerant Canadian nation,” arguing that a “Canadian” identity is entrenched with Euro-centred Whiteness. This chapter also highlights the themes that are present in the existing body of literature on “Brown” youth identities.
Chapter three highlights the social construction of “race” through the analysis of “Brown” youth narratives. I explore the complexity, fluidity, and ambiguity of “Brown” identities as they are expressed by youth in the GTA, arguing that “Brown” identities are fluid and that they change based on the context in which they are expressed.

Through the analysis of youth narratives, chapter four unpacks “Brown” identities in a Canadian context. I argue that “Brown” youth are in an ambiguous space as they negotiate the contradictions of feeling and claiming “Brownness” and “Canadianness” simultaneously. In an effort to reconcile the seemingly conflicting identities, youth claim hyphenated identities, such as “Brown-Canadian,” which signals that the youth have multiple consciousnessness.

In chapter five, I explore how “Brown” youth negotiate and navigate their racial identities in the context of schools in the GTA, which I argue are structured within the logics of White supremacy. Building on existing critiques of multicultural discourses, this chapter highlights the various ways that youth in the GTA are racialized as “Others.”

These chapters highlight how “Brown” youth in the GTA navigate their ambiguous racial identities in schools. Much of the analysis partakes in a critique of discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and expresses the desire to move beyond the Black/White binary in discussions of racial identities so that “Brownness” can be further explored.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review:

Racial Identity Formations In A Canadian Context

The concept of a Canadian nation is based within a Eurocentric notion of a Canadian citizen (Bannerji, 2000), and this notion is articulated within multicultural discourses that perpetuate the myth that Canada is a nation that is free of racial tensions. Accordingly, the popular perception in and about Canada is that racism does not exist. This is because the existence of racism is contrary to the belief of tolerance and diversity that is central to the myth of Canadian multiculturalism.

Canadian society is structured upon a Euro-centred Whiteness, so a Canadian identity is one of Whiteness, and those who are outside of this are deemed to be “Others.” Thus, the Canadian identity is based within a “moral and cultural whiteness” that “is read as being of European/North American origin and of white skin” (Sriskandarajah, 2010, p. 10). Moreover, the Canadian identity is partially formed in opposition to that which is “American” (Kymlicka, 2003). In popular culture, such as movies and documentaries (for example, see 12 Years A Slave, The Interrupters, Fruitvale Station, A Raisin in the Sun, American History X), the news, in historical narratives, and so on, the United States is depicted as a nation that is plagued by racism and racial divide, and that is further characterized by an anti-immigrant attitude. In opposition to this, Canadians repute Canada as a harmonious, diverse, and inclusive nation. Accordingly, Canada and Canadians pride themselves on being multicultural. However, Mackey (2000, p. 152) points to the reality that multiculturalism perpetuates White dominance as it allows only for a limited amount of differences (Sriskandarajah, 2010, p. 9).
The policy of multiculturalism, passed by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971, was a response to the changing social context of Canada in the 1960s. There was increasing hostility in national language discussions, there were increasing calls for equity, and there was also an increasing immigrant population. The chief reasons for the policy of multiculturalism were: to recognize the Francophone Canadians, to respond to the liberal immigration policies that had been put in place, to respond to Aboriginal calls for self-determination, and to create a distinct Canadian identity that would differentiate Canada from the United States and that would also separate Canada from Britain (Esses and Gardner, 1996; Mackey, 2002). While the intention of the multicultural policy was to create a just and equitable society for all Canadians, regardless of culture, ethnicity, or religion, the reality has not been in line with this intention. Some scholars have even argued that this policy was constructed to absorb the voices of the “Other,” not to benefit non-Whites (for example, see Bissoondath, 1993, p. 371).

The existing literature on Canadian multicultural education engages with multiple forms of multiculturalism, which have differing opinions about how to include diversity in schools. The current model of education is based upon liberal multiculturalism, which is the dominant discourse in Canada and also in schools in Canada. The underlying belief of liberal multiculturalism is that there is a natural equality between all people. This creates a contradiction because on the one hand, liberal multiculturalism foregrounds differences that are based on unique subject positions such as race, culture, and religion, but on the other hand, when discussing inequities in society, differences are ignored and inequalities are explained as a result of differing levels of economic, social, and educational opportunities; they are not historically or culturally contextualized (Naseem,
Thus, any deviation from the Eurocentric norm of Canada is viewed through the lens of Whiteness (Ghosh, 2011). Sriskandarajah (2010) writes that, “[t]he Canadian national identity is seen as devoid of a specific culture or ethnicity [and is] rather seen as one based on universal ideas of rationality, progress, and equality” (p. 12). For example, static and stereotypical views of “Others,” such as the notion that “Brown” parents are unreasonably strict with their daughters and that Brown culture is “sexist” and “oppressive” are perpetuated because differences are not contextualized in historical and/or cultural contexts (Naseem, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

Though liberal multiculturalism includes the voices of non-Whites, it is usually one voice that speaks on behalf of an entire race and/or culture, and this one voice becomes representative of the entire group (Naseem, 2011). This is problematic because when a variety of experiences are not heard, the one voice becomes the defining narrative. This results in the homogenization of an entire culture and/or race. For example, the stand-up comedian Russell Peters, who grew up in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), is a famous “Brown” man. Many of his jokes recycle racial and ethnic stereotypes, such as characterizing “Brown” people as stingy with money. While it would be imprudent to say that jokes based on the above-mentioned stereotype make everyone in society believe the stereotype that all “Brown” people are financially stingy, it does indicate the enduring force of the logics of White supremacy that keeps such stereotypes alive. Yet the popularity of Russell Peters normalizes such statements which become part of the dominant narrative on “Brownness” in Canada. These stereotypes also become

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“common sense” and are not seen as racist. In this way, racism becomes a part of the social fabric of society.

Thus, racism is not confronted head-on in Canada because it contradicts the multicultural myth. As Carr (2008) writes, racism “… is easily swept aside in order to focus on the meshing of bodies, and [is] generally understood to be light-hearted rather than systemically debilitating” (p. 5). A quick internet search on racism in Canada generates overwhelming number of stories about racist experiences that people in Canada have encountered (see Appendix K). This search makes it clear that non-Whites in Canada are racialized and that racism is a reality for many people in Canada; Racism is clearly a part of Canadian realities. However, there has been a shift in how racism is expressed. It has changed from being based in skin colour to being based in culture. Given that a “Canadian” identity is one of Whiteness and that “Others” are portrayed in opposition to Whiteness (to the ideas of rationality and progress, for example), non-White cultures are declared as incompatible with “Canadian” culture (Sriskandarajah, 2010, p. 12). In order to discuss this nuanced concept of racism, the social construction of race and racial categories must be discussed. From there, the racial hierarchy that organizes society is unpacked, and the hegemony of Whiteness is revealed. Finally, the racial category of “Brownness” is explored.
The Fallacy And Omnipresence Of Race And Racism

“Race dominates our personal lives. It manifests itself in our speech, dance, neighbors, and friends – “our very ways of talking, walking, eating and dreaming are ineluctably shaped by notions of race” [quoting Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s, at 63, 1986]...In short, race mediates every aspect of our lives.”

This study understands race as something that has a widespread impact on individuals and on society because it is “always already present in every social configuring of our lives” (Morrison, 1992 in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). Accordingly, “[r]ace is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions” (Lopez, 1995, p. 165). Thus, while race is a social construct, it yields tremendous power, as it is through race that we understand and organize our social world; race affects how we see ourselves as well as how we are seen by others. Accordingly, race is viewed as a necessity in every aspect of society and also in social interactions, thus pointing to the immense power that race holds. As Ladson-Billings (1998) writes, “race continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier” (p. 7). In short, race plays a significant role in shaping our identities.

The concept of race is central to how the social world is structured (see Omi and Winant, 1993). Its meaning is constantly (re-)defined and (re-)negotiated, however, because it is an invention of the social realm; the content and significance of individual racial categories are “formed, transformed, destroyed and re-formed” as social, economic and political forces change (Omi and Winant, 1986, p. 61). Moreover, it is necessary to use the concept of race to bring awareness of racist beliefs and the discriminatory and racist practices that are a result of such beliefs (i.e. racism). Both racial categories and the

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23 (Lopez, 1995, p. 164)
concept of race are based upon a foundation of “fallacies and fiction” that become “common sense” (Lopez, 1995, p. 165). Thus, race is a complex concept that is intermingled with a countless number of social practices, and it “has its genesis and maintains its vigorous strength in the realm of social beliefs” (Lopez, 1995, p. 166, 172).

Lopez (1995, p. 168-171) outlines four components of the social construction of race. First, people have formed races, which are thus social constructions and are upheld by societal beliefs. Second, since races are constructed by people, “ideas about race form part of a wider social fabric into which other relations…are woven” (p. 170). This elucidates the argument that race affects our social relations and daily interactions. Third, meanings that are attached to races can and do change very rapidly. For example, Puar and Rai (2004), who are writing on the making and re-making of the model minority myth in relation to South Asians in the United States, write that “[t]he reification of the South Asian model minority stereotype relies on an uneven and privileged historical trajectory of struggle” (p. 79). For instance, after the events of 9/11, a new dimension of exoticism or "Othering" has been added to “Brownness,” as it can be, and often is, associated with terrorism/danger more than it was prior to 9/11.

Lopez’s (1995) fourth component of the social construction of race is that “races are relationally constructed” (p. 171). Accordingly, racial categories rely on one another for continued existence. For example, the identity of Whiteness is (re-)defined and (re-)constructed through the subjugation of the “Other,” and it continues to be upheld as the norm because it is juxtaposed with the “Other;” White is what the “Other” is not. For example, in a post-9/11 North American context, “Brownness” is connected with the ideas of terror/terrorist/danger. This reifies Whiteness as an identity of innocence and
safety because Whiteness is not the terrorist, it is not the threat, and it is not dangerous. Rather, “Brownness” is the terrorist, it is the threat, and it is dangerous, so “Brownness” continues to be constructed as “Other.” Finally, Lopez’s fourth point develops around the discussion about Whiteness (see “The Racial Hierarchy and the Formation of Whiteness, on p. 26). Through Lopez’s (p. 168-171) discussion on the social construction of race, this paper further explores the nuanced concept of race and its pervasive impact in every aspect of society.

**The Racial Hierarchy And The Formation Of Whiteness**

Although a person’s skin colour is one of the first things people notice, it is not an objective observation because there are many presumptions and stereotypes tied to skin colours. It is important to note that Whiteness is always at the centre of this since “Others” are created in relation to Whiteness. This is evident in that Whiteness is the standard upon which non-Whites are judged and organized in a hierarchical manner. This type of organization has its roots in European colonization of “new lands” because it was necessary at that time for Europeans to create systems of domination; these systems were based upon a hierarchy in which Euro-centred Whiteness was constructed as superior, and “Others” were constructed as inferior. It is this logic that “rationalize[d] broken treaties, genocides, mass displacements, and enslavement” (Bedard, 1999, p. 9 using Pratt, 1992; also see Dei, 1996).

When explorers came to the land that is now known as North America, they were working under the premise that the land was not occupied because it was not occupied in a way that was familiar to them. This was the start of Euro-centred Whiteness becoming
the norm, as explorers were willing to understand the “new” lands only from their lens, discounting the ways of knowing of the people who were already living on the land. Additionally, Fanon (1963/2004) argues that colonization created a spatially organized Manichean world in which there are a group of colonizers who are constructed as “good,” and a group of natives who are constructed as “evil.” The identity of the colonizer was dependent on the identity of the native. So, domination over the natives was necessary in order for the colonizer to know who (s)he is. Thus, it is clear that colonialism, and race and racism which is inherent to colonialism, infiltrates every aspect of society and of one’s being; it is the foundation of a Manichean world.

Despite the socially constructed nature of racial categories, they continue to be central in determining who has power (Omi & Winant, 1994). During the time that “new lands” were “discovered” by Europeans, various discourses of science emerged, and these discourses were steeped in Whiteness and were used to justify a racial hierarchy. The discourse of Darwinism, for instance, “naturalized human differences as biologically determined and innate,” and it was through this belief that the White body was created as a superior identity (Bedard, 1999, p. 9). So, it was while surveying Natives of the land that these explorers formed their identities of Whiteness; Whiteness was constructed in relation to how the explorers interpreted the Natives, which was in opposition to them. This hegemony of Whiteness is now normalized through social institutions, such as law, education, and health care.

A further dimension of Whiteness as a superior racial category is discussed by Ladson-Billings (1998, p. 15, using Harris, 1993, p. 1721). She demonstrates that Whiteness was constructed as property and that possession “was defined to include only
the cultural practices of Whites” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 15). This sends the message that Whiteness is property, that this property has material and social value, and that only Whites can own this property of Whiteness. Further, the social construction of Whiteness emerged in opposition to the social construction of Blackness. While both were constructed as property, Blackness was constructed as property that people could quite literally own, and Blacks were denied the right to own property themselves. Thus, Whiteness was constructed as property that yields power, and it was constructed in opposition to Blackness, which was constructed as property that could be owned, as opposed to property that could own Whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 15). Smith (2006) extends this analysis to capitalism, demonstrating that the logic of slavery adds a racial hierarchy to capitalism:

> This racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism. Anti-blackness enables people who are not black to accept their lot in life because they can feel that at least they are not at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy – at least they are not property, at least they are not slaveable (Smith, 2006, p. 67).

Smith (2010) further discusses the idea that a non-White person will never be accepted as truly White. Regardless of how much capital one is able to “own,” (s)he will always be “Othered” and seen as “perpetual foreigners.” This is because Euro-centred Whiteness operates by racializing people based on the Black/White binary. A non-White person’s proximity to Whiteness bestows them with some racial privilege on the one hand, but it simultaneously distinguishes them as “Other.” Thus, Smith (2010) writes that one’s “proximity to whiteness can enable different kinds of white-supremacist projects.”

Finally, in the Canadian context, Whiteness is framed “around the …general sentiment…that the United States is more a historically racist society than is Canada”
(Carr, 2008, p. 9, using Reitz and Banerjee, 2006). This perpetuates the mistaken idea that Canadians are not racist, although the norm in Canada is that of Whiteness. That Whiteness is the Canadian norm is evident from Canada’s structure, in which White languages and cultures are rewarded and valued, and thus reified as the norm. Hence, racial categories are created and upheld through one another, and Whiteness is at the centre of this; it is Whiteness that sets the norm and everything that is non-White is relegated to the margins and is “Othered.” Canada’s inherent racism is evident in its historical and continued formation: the continued colonization of Aboriginal peoples, the refusal to admit entry to passengers aboard the Komagata Maru in 1914, the internment of Japanese-Canadians in 1942, the continued ignorance around the extent of the slavery of Blacks, and the list continues.

**On Being “Brown”**

“Counter to the prevailing discourse on race and racism that dichotomizes racism into a Black/White binary, the experiences of... South Asian...students are fraught with critical tensions among and between [other] groups.”

The “Brown” body is constructed differently at various points through Canadian history, and the way in which it is racialized builds upon a preexisting conceptualization of the White norm that has been used to racialize non-Whites in Canada. Canada was initially populated by the original peoples of Turtle Island, then by British colonization, and then by immigration, so there is a long history of how non-Whites have been racialized in Canada (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 369). For example, Chinese were explicitly racialized in 1903 with the introduction of the Head tax, East Indians were refused admittance to Canada in 1914, Doukhobors, Mennonites and Hutterites were prohibited

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entry into Canada in 1919, a ship carrying Jews was denied entry in 1939, and Japanese-Canadians were placed in internment camps in 1942 (Carr, 2008, p. 7). The diversity of these immigrant populations is replaced by their shared racialization as non-White through these exclusion policies. These pre-existing frameworks and discourses of racialization inform how the “Brown” body has been imagined. Ward (2002, p. 82) suggests that in the early twentieth century, Canada perceived East Indians in hostile and threatening terms much like how Chinese were viewed earlier.

In the early 1900s, South Asians were able to immigrate to Canada because it was a part of the British Empire, under which all colonies were viewed to be equal. The initial wave of immigration from South Asia to Canada occurred between 1907 and 1924. This population was comprised of predominantly male Sikhs who were born in Punjab. Their primary purpose for migration was to provide cheap labour for the construction of the Trans-Canada Railway. Thus, this population was viewed as a temporary population (Navaratnam, 2011, p. 9, using Fleras & Elliot, 2003, Jaicy, 2010, Tran et al., 2005). Canada, however, felt threatened by this population, so its immigration policies were altered to try and exclude South Asian immigration to Canada (see Ward, 2002, p. 87-88). For example, after anti-Asian riots in 1907, Canada implemented the Continuous Journey Regulation, which restricted entry into to immigrants who were coming directly from their home country (Navaratnam, 2022, p. 10). This regulation led to the historic event of the Komagata Maru.

The story of the Komagata Maru is a piece of Canadian history that is suspiciously absent from Canada’s grand narrative, as reproduced in history books, popular culture, and in the general public mind. The Komagata Maru was a ship that was
carrying 376 passengers from South Asia, and it was denied entry into Canada in 1914. However, Canada did not have any legal justification to turn the ship away, so the Komagata Maru remained docked in Vancouver for seven weeks while the government worked on a legally sound justification to deny the South Asian passengers entry into Canada. During this time, the passengers of the ship, who were living in horrid conditions, and also the South Asian population in Canada, were further racialized by Canada’s fears toward this population. The rhetoric surrounding the South Asian population was that there were already too many South Asian immigrants in Canada, that they were a threat to the homogeneity of Canada, and that they were inassimilable (Ward, 2002, p. 90; Prashad, 2000; Kymlicka, 2003, p. 370). Ward (2002, p. 92-93) argues that Canadians were averse to this population because of an irrational racial fear stemming from the idea that South Asians are outside of the ideal “Canadian” that embodies the norm of Whiteness (a White, civilized, European settler), and that this “Otherness” threatened the social cohesion of Canada. Following this logic, the Canadian government denied the Komagata Maru entry into Canada after seven weeks of it being docked at the Canadian shore.25

Starting in 1965, soon after the first wave of South Asian immigration, Canada’s immigration policy as it pertained to South Asians became less constricted. For example, it began to favour educated, trained, skilled, and professional immigrants from South Asia (see Kurian, 1991; Siddiqui, 2004), and access was extended to South Asian women. While these changes may seem forward thinking at first glance, they are an extension of the system of Whiteness. Dua (2000) argues that in the absence of their

25 An unfortunate riot ensued upon the Komagata Maru’s forced return to South Asia. The riot resulted in the death and/or incarceration of many of the ship’s passengers.
“Brown” wives, “South Asian men threatened the centrality of patriarchal relations in Canadian society” (p. 120-121) because they were more likely to have relations with White women if their wives were not present (Siddiqui, 2004). Here is another historical moment of how Canada, and Whiteness, controls and dictates the racialization of “Brown” people, “Brown” families, and the “Brown” community: how they are to behave, socialize, be viewed, and be treated.

Presently, the view of Asian immigrants in Canada has shifted from a historically negative view to a seemingly positive one. While Asian immigrants were quite overtly viewed as undesirable in the early to mid-1900s, Navaratnam (2011) argues that they are perceived as the model minority today. As the model minority, Asian immigrants are viewed “as an example for other racialized groups, especially those who are not achieving ‘success’ at the same rate [as Asians in Canada]” (Navaratnam, 2011, p. 17-18). While there is a substantial amount of literature on Asian immigrants in North America as the model minority, there seems to be disagreement about this label and whether it accurately applies to South Asians in Canada. Understanding the notion of the model minority within the Black/White binary demonstrates that it is an example of how White supremacy operates and that it is a continuation of colonization because it is integral to the racial hierarchy (p. 19). This notion positions non-White “groups” against one another because they are in competition to gain as much White privilege as possible so that they can attain the status of White. This further diverts attention from systemic/institutional oppressions and instead perpetuates stereotypes and also the myth of meritocracy (see Museus & Kiang, 2009). Furthermore, scholars have also argued that

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26 For a discussion on how South Asian immigrants have been constructed as the model minority, see Puar and Rai (2004); Sayani (2010), Chapter 5; Shankar (2008).
the model minority conceptualization is rooted in new racism, which is couched in the language of cultural difference: “[N]ew racism justifies the unequal treatment of racialized groups based on cultural differences, and asserts that Western cultures are better than others” (Navaratnam, 2011, p. 19).

In both Canadian and American literature, “Brown” (specifically South Asian) immigrants are often conceptualized as the model minority. However, racialized immigrants are in constant flux with “the (shifting) parameters of…citizenship, belonging, and inclusion” (Puar and Rai, 2004, p. 77). Writing in the American context, Puar and Rai (2004) write that the concept of the model minority is a part of the discourse of U.S. exceptionalism, and further that “[t]his model minority is predominantly a reference to economic exceptionalism, upward mobility, and educational excellence, but it does have its specific gendered, racialized, and national components of difference” (p. 77). They further explicate that “[t]his projection occurs namely in those national sites where the need for menial and physical labo[u]r over determined the class status of immigrants,” with Canada being one of the contexts where this happens (p. 77).

Also discussing the model minority concept within the American educational context, Ngo (2006) suggests that this stereotype affirms the dominant ideology that the United States is “the land of opportunity,” thus perpetuating the myth of the American Dream (p. 60). This stereotype also reasserts the racial hierarchy, in which Blacks are at the bottom, and Asians are at the top of other non-Whites:

Asian Americans, we are told, are able to “make it” on their own, without special assistance or anyone’s help. Implicitly, historically marginalized groups (e.g. African Americans) are told that their failure is not due to the fact that the USA is a fundamentally racist society…For those who fail to ‘make it,’ the implication is that there must be something wrong with their culture (p. 60).
Thus, the model minority conception perpetuates the racial hierarchy, it pits non-Whites against one another, it diverts attention from systemic/institutional racism and focuses on deficit thinking, and it individualizes failures. This is perpetuated because systemic issues are not addressed in the discourse of new racism, which uses the language of culture instead of the language of race. While much of the literature that has been drawn thus far is from the American context, the authors themselves state that the arguments are relevant to the general North American context, or that they are specifically applicable to the Canadian context. Prashad’s (2000), for example, writes that South Asian Americans are neither Black, nor White, but that people with “Asian backgrounds are [viewed as] a solution in multi-ethnic North American societies…[and that this] has also been called the model minority stereotype” (Navaratnam, 2011, p. 15).

The model minority myth can work to mask difficulties students may be encountering at school and within the Canadian education system in general. This is because the myth perpetuates stereotypes that often dictate teachers’ expectations of students and that perpetuate a one-dimensional identity of students. Thus, the cyclical nature of Whiteness and racism continues: a student faces an institutional barrier that results in him/her failing a course, the logic of White supremacy does not allow for a systemic analysis, so the student and/or his/her family is blamed, and the system remains as is. Moreover, the student is simultaneously placed outside of the model minority stereotype and is conceptualized as a “problem.” When a student “succeeds,” the same thing happens. (S)he is placed within the model minority stereotype because his/her academic success reaffirms the logic of the model minority myth. However, the “success” is seen as a result of an equitable system, not a result of the individual’s efforts per se.
Another theme that is present in the literature around “Brownness” is the theme of multiple consciousnesses. “Brown” youth are found to possess multiple and contradictory layers of identities. Similar to the discussion on race, identity is a social construction (see James, 2003), and accordingly, its nature is fluid, it is heterogeneous, and it is nuanced. Accordingly, identity has multiple layers to it, and these layers do not necessarily complement one another. Some of the layers of identity are: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, language, and religion. To explore this nuanced and complex concept, this study utilizes an interlocking approach (Razack, 2005, p. 343; see Razack, 1998, p. 11-12;) to explore identity. This approach recognizes that there is a connection between all systems; systems of oppression are intertwined and rely on one another for their continued existence, so one is not more powerful than another. Accordingly, this paper situates its analysis within the system of White supremacy, in which “Brown” identities are (re-)created, (re-)defined, (re-)negotiated, and contested. Furthermore, the notion of power, which permeates the concept of identity and the process of identity formation, is understood in the Foucauldian sense; power is relational and multi-dimensional. Accordingly, no one is outside of power. Rather, how one is situated within the world determines how one understands and thinks about the world (Foucault, 1980).

**Brown In The Education System**

Overall, there is a dearth of research on “Brownness” in Canada, especially in relation to identity, youth, and education. Nonetheless, within research that has been conducted, there is the reoccurring theme of identity fragmentation, as “Brown” cannot be “Canadian,” which is an identity of Euro-centred Whiteness, so “Brown” is never truly
“Canadian.” How “Brown” youth express these identity fragmentations, however, differs, as does the way that scholars articulate and explore these identity fragmentations. In the literature, the effects of a “Brown” identity that is created within a Black/White binary are discussed. On the one hand is the criminalization of the “Brown” body that often results in trouble at school and/or with the law, and on the other hand is the internal fragmentation of identity that is covertly experienced by a person:

Southeast Asian Americans are uniquely positioned both within and outside this discourse of academic success. On the one hand, Southeast Asians are lumped with other Asian American groups and viewed as part of the “model minority.” On the other hand, they are portrayed as gangsters, high school dropouts, and welfare dependents (Ngo, 2006, p. 60).

This dual perception creates a gap in services for students because “on the one extreme […is the assumption] that they have no problems, and on the other extreme […] is the belief that they are ‘lazy’ and do not deserve assistance” (p. 60).

Thus, the literature on Brown/South Asian youth/immigrants/identities (and in relation to schooling/schools/education) points to different expressions of “Brownness,” from painting a picture of the model minority and its related conception of the successful immigrant, to tensions that exist within the community/family and/or the school and the student and the criminalized body that is created from these tensions.
CHAPTER 3
A Brown Identity: Multi-Layered, Fluid, and Ambiguous

A racial identity is an imposed social construction that signifies much more than just the colour of someone’s skin. At the core of racial categories are what Bedard (1999, p. 2) calls racial imaginaries, which “are cognitive structures that assist…people to categorize the vast majority of information about their world and themselves.” As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Euro-centred Whiteness is the norm in Canada, and as a result, Canadians understand those around them and themselves in relation to Whiteness. However, racial categories are fluid and they change based on the context in which they are negotiated. Batman’s story about his elementary school (which took place in New York) speaks to the transient nature of racial categories. Batman went to elementary school in an area that had a large amount of “Black” students and very few non-Black students. Since Batman was not “Black,” he was called “White.” There was another student in this school who Batman considered “Brown” (this student was from Guyana), but who other students considered “Black.” This was perplexing for Batman, who decided to call himself “Tan” because he did not relate to being called “White” and he was not accepted as “Black:”

And that school, it was aaall Black people, maybe a few Spanish kids, but there was noooo White kids. I was the oonne Brown kid there. It was like, it wasn’t good to be a white kid then, in that school, and like-like- if you weren’t Black, you were considered a White kid, and I didn’t wanna be a White kid, like, but like you wouldn’t expect the Brown kid to be White. They didn’t know what to, like, do with me really, cuz there was this other Guyanese kid. His name was X. I really hated him because like, like, Guyanese kids are kind of like Indian and Pakistani anyway, right, so I was like, ‘yo, you look like me, like what the hell’ but one of the other guys was like, ‘nah, he’s Black too.’ I was like, ‘no he’s not! This is not fair!’ But it was pretty jokes, like I-I decided to make my own thing. I called myself Tan. Because like I didn’t know what I was supposed to call – I was dark, not white, I’m tan [emphasis added].
The complexity of this relationship between skin colour and its meanings was brought to the forefront during interviews that were conducted for this study. Participant 2 said that using skin colour to identify someone is a way to define and categorize a person; it is not literally the colour that a person is. To further complicate the idea of skin colour, I ask the following questions: Are Black people really the colour black? Are White people really the colour white? Are Brown people really the colour brown? And, is everyone who claims membership (or who is assigned membership) to a racial group the same colour?

This sets the basis upon which this study conducts its analysis: racial categories are conceptualized, expressed, and negotiated within a Black/White binary. Further, racial identities are “placed on a black-white continuum and are ‘assigned different stations along the path toward whiteness’” (Subedi, 2008, p. 61, using Ong, 2003, p. 11). In a Canadian context, then, a “Brown” identity is expressed in a way that makes space for this identity because it is neither a Black identity nor a White identity.

**What is a Brown Self Anyway?**

There is a dearth of scholarship on “Brownness” in the Canadian context, especially in relation to identity, youth, and education (Sayani, 2010; Sundar, 2008; Navaratnam, 2011; Ngo, 2008; Abbas, 2007; Guney, 2007; Kilbride, et al., 2001; George & Ramkisson, 1998; Guzder, 2011; Malhi & Boon, 2008). This has resulted in a void of knowledge and discussions about the experiences and identities of “Brown” youth. Moreover, much of the literature that is available on “Brownness” (from both inside and outside of Canada) rarely uses the term “Brown,” but tends to use “South Asian” (see
Abbas, 2007; George & Ramkisson, 1998; Guzder, 2011; Malhi & Boon, 2008; Navaratnam, 2011; Ngo, 2006; Samuel, 2004; Shariff, 2008; Desai & Subramanian, 2000) or “Asian” (see Guney, 2007) instead; “Brown” or “South Asian” are the more common terms used in Canadian literature, and there is a small body of work that discusses the politics of using these terms (see Sayani, 2010; Subedi, 2008; Sundar, 2008). However, the scholarship that is available on “Brownness” does not necessarily centre race, nor does it not focus on “Brownness” as it is experienced and understood by youth.

This silence around “Brownness” was also evident to the participants of this study, who, in one way or another, alluded to the idea that “Brownness” is not spoken about. When asked what sparked his interest in volunteering to be a participant in this study, Participants 3 said that,

Participants 3: …it seems interesting, the idea of focusing on like Brown people, and the community and stuff, and I was wondering what it was all about.

AR: So, why, why would that be something that interests you, that would be interesting?

Participants 3: I guess because people in regards to like race and like background, their concerns are more towards like black people and you don’t really hear issues about like Brown people. So, it seemed interesting.

Along the same lines, Participant 1 felt that the terms “Black” and “White” are used often enough for her to associate them with an image, but when she hears the term “Brown,” she does not know what to associate it with:

…when the other terms get used, you imagine other things that are……like if black gets used, you imagine black people. And white gets used, you imagine white people, and that’s the most terms being used right now, but when someone says Brown, you can’t imagine anything because barely anyone uses it (Participant 1).
Thus, although “Brown” is not widely used in the literature, it is used amongst youth who identify with the racial category of “Brown.” For example, Sundar’s (2008) work explores the identities of second-generation South Asians aged 18 to 25 and finds that race is salient to their identities. These participants use “Brown” as their “primary identifier” because it is permanent, it is always there, and people react to it (p. 259). Based on discussions with the participants of her study, Sundar describes “Brown” as a “racial group [that focuses] on skin color[…] [and that is employed…] to describe South Asian people of various religious and cultural backgrounds” (p. 258-259). She also finds that the terms “Brown” and “South Asian” are used interchangeably because they “indicate a shared historical connection to the Indian subcontinent that is reflected in similar traditions, values, and customs” (p. 259). Similarly, in her thesis, Birk (2009, p. 3-5) engages with a conversation on labels: What should this group of people be called? How do they identify? What does “Brown” mean? And, what is the significance of these terms – the significance on the individual and also the societal implications?

There is difficulty in situating “Brown” within existing literature because is not commonly used amongst scholars (with the exception of a few, such as Prashad, 2000). For example, in excerpts from Sayani’s (2010) interviews with “Brown boys” in British Colombia, it became clear that even when participants use the term “Brown” to identify themselves or to refer to themselves, scholars do not use “Brown” when theorizing. For example, Sayani uses “South Asian” when writing about the “Brown boys” he interviewed. Moreover, Sayani (p. 360) finds that while educators and non-South Asian students refer to “Brown” students as “Indo-Canadian,” the “Brown” students he interviewed do not position themselves within this hyphenated identity. Rather, they...
identify as “Brown boys” or “Brown crew.” This points to the problematic reality that people in positions of authority are imposing identifications upon participants. Similar to Sayani’s (2008) use of “Brown” and “South Asian,” Handa’s (2003) work primarily makes use of “South Asian,” except for when she discusses issues specific to race and identity.

Moreover, this current study is similar to the one conducted by Sayani (2010), in which the schooling experiences of “disaffected South Asian male students” are explored. In his work, Sayani pays attention to the identity of these students as South Asian and is cognizant of how they “are positioned and how they position themselves” (p. 29). Similarly, this study investigates the range of “Brown” experiences by speaking to self-identified “Brown” students and trying to understand each person’s identity and how they make sense of their own identity. Sayani argues that there is nothing natural, static, essential, or fixed about identities, but that they are constantly changing. This study subscribes to his understanding of identities as “the temporary meeting points where subjects assume or adopt subject-positions,” which are constructed through signs and symbols, and are ways in which people (or the subject) express or articulate themselves (or their identities) (p. 34).

Identities are steeped with meaning because they exist within language, and they are thus created and read within the social world. Poststructuralists assert that the social world is composed of language, which is not neutral: “…our social world is constructed by the signs and signifiers of language and…we can only understand this world through the meanings that these signs and signifiers create” (Hassard, 1993 in Sayani, 2010, p. 30). Thus, a one-way, linear relationship between a word (signifier) and an object
(signified) does not exist. Instead, “meanings are created within an infinite and inter-
textual play of signifiers” (Sayani, 2010, p. 30).27 Using poststructuralist theory, then, this 
study further understands identities as “fictions of language” that “are unstable, 
deterrminate, and ephemeral” (p. 30).

Furthermore, it is crucial to add the experiential component to identities. This 
dimension recognizes the substantial effect that experiences have on how a person 
understands himself/herself: “…who individuals understand themselves to be will have 
direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their worlds” 
(Sayani, 2010, p. 35). This is connected to the idea of interlocking identities, as one 
identity, such as being “Brown,” cannot be separated from another identity, such as being 
a female, because it “begins to theorize the connections among social locations, 
experience, cultural identity, materiality, and knowledge” (p. 35). Thus, there is a 
complex relationship between all subject positions (i.e. race, class, gender, ability, 
sexuality), and every individual is perceived, and perceives, an experience in a unique 
way because of his/her subject positions.

When I was interviewing “Brown” youth, I asked each of them what “Brown” 
means to them (Why and how do they identify as “Brown?” What makes someone 
“Brown?” What are the characteristics/traits of “Brownness?”), and it became 
immediately clear that there is a complex intermingling of factors that shape the racial 
category of “Brown;” it is far more than just skin colour. This difficulty that was felt by 
the participants in “defining” “Brown” is exemplified by the following:

Weelll………..hmm…….it’s a……..well obviously a Brown person…….well 
then again, Brown people are like, you would put them in the same

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27 For a more thorough discussion on the interplay between signs and signifiers, see Sandoval (2000): 
Chapter 4 - Semiotics and languages of emancipation.
Southeast Asia…in that general area, so then, but there’s also so many different cultures there……so we can’t……I-you have to look at the culture and like………………I dunno, that’s tough (Participant 3).

The above excerpt, which was not a response unique to just one participant, illustrates the difficulties and hesitations that participants had when trying to “define” the term “Brown.”

Additionally, participants of this study consider “Brown” and “South Asian” to be interchangeable terms. Batman said that, “South Asian is basically the more politically correct way to say it. But it’s the same thing.” Batman self-identifies as a “Brown guy” because “[b]oth of [his] parents are Pakistani [and because he has] a Pakistani passport.” Participant 1 also uses the two terms interchangeably. She understands “Brown” as a broad term that encompasses one’s language, religion, culture, accent, and so on. Participant 1 said that she identifies as “Brown” because of her skin colour, and that she also identifies as “Indian” because of her culture. Here, it is clear that Participant 1 understands the complexities of navigating a “Brown” identity in a space of Whiteness. It seems that she relates more to a self-identity of “Indian” because she relates to “Indian culture,” and that her self-identity of “Brown” is based on her skin colour and its significance in a Canadian context. However, self-identifying based on country of origin becomes problematic, especially for 1.5-generation immigrants who may or may not identify with the country where they were born or even with the same culture as their parents’. Participant 1, who moved to Canada more recently than the other participants, was the only participant to express a strong identity based on the country where she was born. Moreover, Participant 1 uses the term “Brown” colloquially when speaking to and about family and friends. To her, “Brown” is a category based on one’s skin colour, and its accuracy is based on whether a person was from South Asia.
“Brown” Is An Umbrella Term

Participants of this study understand “Brown” as an umbrella term under which people can be identified further based on their country of origin. For example, participant 3 decided that the term “Brown” is used as an “umbrella term” for a group of people who are “Brown,” and “from there, figure out who’s who” (Participant 3). This is in line with Sayani’s (2010) position on the term “South Asian:” “the term ‘South Asian’ collectively refers to individuals from the Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu communities (p. 15). However, individuals who do not belong to one of these faith-based groups, but who directly or indirectly trace their lineage to the Indian subcontinent can also position or be positioned [within] the category of South Asian.” Thus, the youth who were interviewed for this study acknowledge the heterogeneity and complexities that exist within labels, such as “South Asian” or “Brown.”

Participant 1’s understanding of the term “Brown” corresponded with Participant 3’s understanding of the term as an “umbrella term,” but it also pointed to the tensions that exist within racial categories:

Participant 1: When people say Brown……they look at the skin colour mostly……And like where you’re from and they judge you by where you’re from and your skin colour and everything. And cuz, cuz, cuz, I’m not sayin it’s racism, but that’s how people divide it, you know – like White, Black, Brown……So you know, to like one particular identity.

AR: So what – what do you think goes along with being Brown? And what’s in that category?

Participant 1: Like, Brown as in, you could be different identities – Indian, Pakistani, and it goes on. But if you’re a different skin colour and they call you Brown, like, if someone’s brown skin and they’re not really Brown and they get called brown, they get offended.

AR: Why do you think that is?

Participant 1: Because they’re not the skin colour.

Similar to Participant 1, while Participant 3 self-identifies as “Brown,” he recognizes that this identification is based on more than the colour of his skin. Identifying someone as
“Brown” “is just like……an observation,” he said, but “some people might get offended [because] there’s Brown people who aren’t actually like Brown…they just have a different skin tone” (Participant 3). To explain this, Participant 3 used the example of a friend who would overtly fit the identification of Brown because of the colour of his skin, but who would not self-identify as Brown:

I have a friend who is Tamil, but he lives, he was raised up in like a Canadian environment, like a real Canadian environment, like hockey and everything, like he’s a hockey fan. So……I guess, to call him like Brown, he wouldn’t be too fond of that, because he’s not, it’s just the skin tone, but otherwise he’s all about Canada and stuff, like hockey and…it’s just like his personality, it’s not like…..cultural…..like Southeast culture.

So, Participant 3 views an identity of “Brownness” as more than skin colour because culture is also a part of “Brownness.” However, an additional dimension to “Brownness” was raised: a “Brown” culture and a “Canadian” culture cannot exist together: you are either one or the other (this binary between “Brown” and “Canadian” is discussed in Chapter 4: The Contradiction Of A Brown Identity In A Canadian Context: Brown Is Not Canadian Because Canadian Is White). Participant 1 also expressed the opinion that a Brown identity has a cultural aspect to it. Participant 1 mentioned that some of her classmates may get offended if they are called “Brown” because they don’t self-identify as “Brown” and “because they don’t want to be known for that culture.”

Participant 1 seemed to use the terms and ideas of race and culture with fluidity. In her opinion, for example, the way that one dresses is a result of “what culture you’re from…that comes in the cultural category, not like skin colour brown” (Participant 1). However, she also recognizes the similarities in the cultural clothing between people who are considered “Brown.” Overall, participants of this study understand “Brown” as an identification that includes both culture and race. However, this gets further complicated
because although “Brown people…would [be put] in the [general area of] Southeast Asia,” there’s…so many different cultures there.” This is indicative of a central theme that emerged from the interviews: there is no straightforward definition of “Brown” and “Brownness.”

The Complexity And Nuances of “Brownness”

Participants discussed racial categories as a way to identify the geographic location from where a person or his/her family came to Canada. While I was coding interviews for the analysis of this study, it became immediately clear that a “Brown” identity is comprised of multiple layers, such as culture, country of origin, language, religion, and ethnicity. Since skin colour is a visible feature, a person is first and foremost considered “Brown” based on the colour of his/her skin. However, this is not as straightforward as it sounds because of the tonal variation in skin colour. The remainder of this chapter will explore the multiple layers that comprise a Brown identity and the complexities that arise with racial categories.

As discussed in Chapter 2, when engaging with the literature on race and racial identities, “the criteria to position oneself or be positioned as South Asian [or Brown] are ambiguous and indeterminate” (Sayani, 2010, p. 16). For example, a dark skinned person who speaks Malayalam, who moved from Kerala two years ago, and who is Christian, would likely have different experiences from a light skinned person who speaks Urdu, who moved from Karachi 20 years ago, and who is Muslim. Looking at these individuals through a lens of Whiteness, they would both be “Othered” on the basis of having a “South Asian identity” which is already inscribed with essentialist characteristics; it
ignores the diversity that exists within people who identify as South Asian because it present “South Asian identity” as a homogenous identity.

The extent to which “Brownness” is expressed varies depending on the context in which it is being expressed. There are many sub-groups that people who have brown skin and who trace their lineage to South Asia self-identify with. These groupings are based on many factors, such as country of origin, social class in the country of origin, and how “Brown” one acts. Accordingly, a “Brown” identity is comprised of numerous layers, which are expressed depending on the context in which the identity is being negotiated. Given that identities are fluid, temporary, and subjective (see Hall, 1996), there are numerous dimensions to identities. For example, in Sundar’s (2008) study, participants discuss emphasizing or deemphasizing aspects of their “Brown” identity depending on the context. Sundar writes that

[youth also describe “browning it up” or “bringing down the brown” in order to gain or maintain a sense of belonging in particular groups. Participants most often “bring down the brown” with their mainstream peers in order to avoid social exclusion on the basis of their different ethnic/racial or religious background. Alternatively, youth “brown it up” with other South Asian-Canadians (p. 266).]

Also writing in the Canadian context, but with a specific focus on second-generation Canadians, Shariff (2008, p. 77) finds that participants are aware of the difference between “how we see ourselves and how others see us.” Along the same lines, participants of the current study identify as “Brown” because society sees them that way, because of their skin colour, and because they trace their lineage to South Asia. However, they have a complex relationship with “Brownness,” which was evidenced when participants spoke about distancing themselves from the positive and negative stereotypes that are associated with being “Brown.”
In the interviews, I found that participants were blatantly trying to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes that are associated with “Brownness,” such as eating curry, smelling like curry, and speaking with an accent. To counter these stereotypes, participants showcased White Euro-centred “Canadianness” because “if you don’t [fit within the stereotypes], they can’t make fun of you” (Batman). Batman suggests that “Brown guys” must adhere to the norms of “Canadianness” so that they can fit in, because if one fits in, one will not be made fun of. When explaining this, Batman removes himself from the category of a “Brown guy,” and he speaks from a position of normativity, or authority. None of the five participants of this study identify with, nor present, the stereotypes of “Brown” people (such as speaking with an accent or smelling like curry) that they suggested are prevalent in Canadian society.

After participants discussed “Brownness” in relation to skin colour, there was an almost instantaneous gravitation toward the geographic location that a person or his/her ancestors were born. For example, when Batman was discussing his “core group of friends,” he described one of them, T, as Pakistani. This categorization was immediately followed by this statement: “he has really fair skin and brown hair[,s]o he doesn’t look like he’s Pakistani……He looks kinda Kashmiri.” So, although T’s physical appearance did not fit within the pre-existing framework of what it means to be Pakistani, Batman still considered him to be “Brown” because he was able to trace his lineage to a country in South Asia. One of the defining features of a “Brown” identity, then, is the ability to trace one’s lineage to South Asia. This seems to be the most salient feature of a “Brown identity.” Hence, the theme of an authentic “Brown” identity, or if one is “really Brown” (Participant 1) arose in the interviews.
After a person traces his/her lineage to South Asia, (s)he is categorized and scrutinized based on a pre-existing framework of what it means to be from specific countries in South Asia. Participants of this study defined someone as “Brown” if they can trace their lineage to South Asia, but then there is a need to further scrutinize that: which country are they from in South Asia? Do they fit the stereotype of that particular country’s population (physiologically and characteristically)? Batman’s above mentioned quote about T illustrates this categorization that happens based on physical appearance. Participant 1 warns about reaching such conclusions based solely on skin colour: “That’s how it is in my school, like. Yea. If you call someone Brown but they’re not really Brown and their skin’s brown, they get offended. They’re like, why’re you calling my Brown if I’m not Brown. You know what I’m sayin?” (Participant 1). Again, participants of this study stress the importance of tracing one’s lineage to a country in South Asia when defining someone as “Brown.” This leads into a discussion on the intersectionality of identity.

**A “Brown” Identity Is Self-Imposed And Externally Imposed**

Identity is fluid, so what it means to be “Brown” means different things in different contexts. Further, people can choose how to self-identify, so identity is subjective, but identities are also imposed upon people. So, there is a difference between perceived identity and experienced identity. Accordingly, one side of “Brownness” is a self-identity of “Brownness” and another is society’s definition of “Brownness.” A “Brown” identity that is imposed upon a person is already inscribed with essentialist characteristics because
it is constructed through a lens of Euro-centred Whiteness; “Brownness” is what Whiteness is not. This is illuminated by Batman’s following comments:

Batman: Yea I have stereotyping associated – like - like - people make fun of Brown people for like-like-like-like for like eating curry or what not, right, depends, right? The thing is like, that’s if [emphasis on ‘if’] you don’t dress well, and like, don’t’ show, and smell like that then people will make fun of you, but like - you know what I’m sayin, like – if you’re not – if you don’t do that, they can’t make fun of you.

AR: What do you mean ‘if you don’t dress well,’ what does it mean?
Batman: Naw, I don’t mean like not dress well, but like…..like-some people – some Brown guys, like, they don’t shower at all, and you can smell it off them. They smell like biryani hot off the tava, you know what I’m sayin [laughs] it’s like – it’s like- it’s like- it’s like –it’s like-it’s like dawg, like, you can shower, you can use cologne. It’s like basic grooming. you know what I’m sayin. It’s not like – no one’s asking you to go that extra mile, it’s like basic grooming. Some of them don’t do that. I guess they sho-but I guess the thing is that because of Hollywood and media and stuff there’s already that perceptions, so people can make those jokes. know what I’m sayin? (Batman)

Batman is clearly aware of negative stereotypes that are associated with “Brownness.”

The idea of “dressing well” is synonymous with dressing “Canadian,” which is wearing White European clothing. This is the opposite of wearing “traditionally” South Asian clothes. Batman’s comment could also imply the idea that a “Brown guy” should dress fashionably so that he does not stand out. As Batman says toward the end of the above excerpt, a discourse of “Brownness” that is based within stereotypical perceptions of what it means to be “Brown” already exists, and it is up to a “Brown guy” to ensure that he is not lumped within the stereotypes because “people make fun of Brown people [and]…if you don’t [fit within the stereotypes], they can’t make fun of you” (Batman).

The emphasis here is on an imposed identity of “Brownness” because the focus is on how one looks and acts: does one look like (s)he fits within society’s ideas of what it means to be “Brown?” This is an example of identity that is imposed upon an individual, and from Batman’s comments, one can discern the difficulties and contradictions that are inherent
to navigating a “Brown” identity in a space of Whiteness and within a framework of Black/White racial categories. It is clear that Batman is aware of how he is perceived based on his physical appearance. Further, he tries to change his physical appearance in order to fit the norm so that he does not stand out in a negative way.

Aside from identification that society imposes upon a person, a person self-identifies with an identity that (s)he believe fits him/her. When culture and the relationship between culture and “Brownness” arose in interviews, participants spoke to self-identifications. This is when the complexities of the racialized identity of “Brownness” became further evident. When culture enters the conversation, for example, Participant 3 begins to articulate the nuances of a “Brown” identity:

This is what I come from, but this is what I am…because I come from there, I guess I would lean more towards Tamil culture and everything, but even with that, like of course at home my mom and stuff, she’s cultural, and like um…but I personally don’t follow that. I respect that. I have a high respect for that I guess.

So, Participant 3 identifies as “Brown” because of the colour of his skin and because his parents are from Sri Lanka, but he seems to be gravitating towards something else, which is assumingly a “Canadian” identity. Participant 3 resolves these complexities by compartmentalizing the layers of identity. On the one hand, Participant 3 relates to “Tamil culture,” but at a distance. The relationship that he has with “Tamil culture” is his ability to trace his lineage to Sri Lanka. On the other hand, he does not prescribe to “Tamil culture.” So, a divide between Tamil culture and his culture, as a 1.5-generation Canadian immigrant, comes into play. This could result in a hyphenated identity or in a fragmentation of identity (an in-depth discussion of this concept is undertaken in Chapter 4).
This chapter has found that the term “Brown” is used by youth as an umbrella term, and that it is interchangeable with the term “South Asian.” Some of the defining features of a “Brown” identity are culture, tracing one’s lineage to South Asia, and skin colour, “Brown” is a complex identity that is multi-layered and fluid. Moreover, expressing one’s “Brown” identity is a way for youth to make space for themselves, as racial categories are conceptualized within a Black/White binary. Moreover, youth are constantly navigating the stereotypes associated with being “Brown,” such as “dressing well” and “not smelling,” so that they fit into the norm.

This chapter’s discussion on identity is crucial, but it is also imperative to keep in mind Alcoff’s (2006) warning that describing a social identity is problematic because many constructions are “homogenizing, essentialist, reductive, or simplistic” (p. 14). The goal of this work has not been to determine what constitutes a “Brown” identity, or to say that how the five participants experience schooling and their “Brownness” should be generalized to “Brown” students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Rather, this study is adding to a critical discussion that is not happening, a discussion regarding “Brown” identity and the relationship between “Brown” identity and colonial spaces, such as schools, in the multicultural environment of the GTA.
CHAPTER 4
The Contradictions Of A “Brown” Identity In A Canadian Context:

“Brown” Is Not “Canadian” Because “Canadian” Is White

Diversity is central to a Canadian identity: accommodation of diversity is enshrined in policies (for a discussion of how multicultural policies affect social inclusion, see Hyman, Meinhard, Shields, 2011), directives (i.e. Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy), and even legislation (i.e. The Multicultural Act). However, as was explored in Chapter 2, a Canadian identity is engrained within the discourses of Euro-centred Whiteness and liberal multiculturalism.

In his paper, Being Canadian, Kymlicka (2003) defines a Canadian identity as one that is (re-)negotiated “in relation to internal sub-group identities…[and] also in relation to…external international or transnational identities” (p. 357). This means that a Canadian identity is (re-)constructed in relation to people in Canada, who come from diverse backgrounds, and also in relation to other countries in the world. Beginning with a discussion on the latter, part of being “Canadian” is being a world “citizen” (p. 358-359). This necessitates a distinction between “Canadians” and “Americans” because one essence of the Canadian identity is based on the idea of being the opposite of the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United States. For example, in opposition to American society, “Canadians” characterize Canadian society as “a classless, meritocratic, and democratic society that is open to newcomers and to new ideas” (p. 362). Accordingly, when discussing race and racism, a Canadian identity claims a colour-blind attitude, which further sets “Canadians” apart from “Americans,” as “Americans” are known for their historical and continued racism (see for example Alexander, 2012). The distinction between Canada and the United
States’ attitudes toward race can be seen in the example that the United States collects race-based statistics while Canada does not. Thus, a Canadian identity is created within a Canadian/American dichotomy, resulting in the Canadian identity being constructed in opposition to the internationally aggressive, racist, and conservative American identity (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 363-368).

Canadian identity is also constructed through the belief in the neutrality and innocence of Canada (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 361). This does not allow for Canada to engage with conversations about race or to acknowledge racism because doing so would be contrary to the belief of neutrality and innocence. Rather, this logic contributes to the erasure of Canada’s racist and colonial history. As Kymlicka writes,

> [f]or much of its history, Canada was seen by its rulers as essentially a (white) British country, an outpost of British culture and civilization in the New World. Non-British groups, including French, Aboriginal and immigrant groups, were at best tolerated, at worst excluded entirely. This was reflected in the predominance of the English language over French within the federal government, the adoption of British symbols and holidays, and in rules that excluded Asians and Africans from emigrating to Canada, and that excluded Aboriginals from citizenship. Needless to say, many minority groups had difficulty feeling Canadian when it was defined in this narrowly white/ British way (p. 376).

This leads to the second aspect of a Canadian identity: it is (re-)negotiated in relation to Canada’s ethnically and racially diverse population. Summarizing the general opinion of commentators on Canadian identity, Kymlicka suggests that for Canada to function well, “Canadians” “must have a strong feeling of ‘being Canadian,’ in addition to their feelings of belonging to sub-groups” (p. 376). However, non-Whites cannot identify as “Canadian” because a Canadian identity is inextricably linked with Euro-centred Whiteness. Thus, although diversity in Canada has increased and policies and public
discourses have adapted accordingly, this study finds that a Canadian identity is still one that is constructed within the logics of Whiteness.

**Seemingly Incompatible Identities: Claiming “Brownness” And “Canadianness”**

Participants of this study recognize that they cannot claim a solely Canadian identity because being an authentic “Canadian” means being White. For example, for Participant 1, being “Canadian” is outside of being “Indian” because the two identities do not make sense together. “[B]eing Canadian is like you follow what Canadians do. And you have to put aside your culture for a bit.” Similarly, Participant 3, who identifies himself as “Brown-Canadian,” under the premise that he is “a little bit of both,” views the two identities, that of being “Canadian” and that of being “Brown,” as incompatible:

Well, other people, I guess see me as a Brown person because of my skin tone and stuff, but, uhm, I’m Brown, I guess. Personally I am Brown because of my skin tone it’s more apparent like where I come from. But, um……like culturally, like, I’ve adopted to Canadian culture, so I like I’m not Brown in that sense, I guess.

I sensed some uneasiness when participants attempted to articulate an identity that simultaneously expressed “Brownness” and “Canadianness.” This stems from the Black/White binary in which racial categories are (re-)negotiated. “Brown” youth are fighting to create space for themselves in which they can articulate their identities based on their experiences as “Brown” youth and as “Canadian” youth. It is difficult to do this, however, for a few reasons. First, “Brown” youth are racialized and “Othered” by dominant Canadian society, which labels non-White people as “visible minorities,” “immigrants,” and so on. People that fall under such labels deviate from the Canadian
norm, and they are seen as “perpetual foreigners” (Hing, 2002). Second, the aforementioned reality that non-Whites are “Othered” is an uncomfortable conversation to have in Canada because of the discourse of liberal multiculturalism. Part of Canada’s international identity is that it welcomes people from all over the world. In this context, how can a “Brown” youth express feelings of disconnectedness that stem from the fact that they are not White? The space for this reality to be expressed does not exist. Third, “Brown” youth “exist in a liminal space” (Shariff, 2008, p. 72) because they are neither “Brown” enough, nor are they “White” enough. In this context, then, “Brown” youth sometimes gravitate toward expressing a “Black” identity or a “White” identity, depending on the situation and context.

Participants of this study spoke to the reality that even when they identify as “Canadian,” people in Canada still see them as “Brown,” not as “Canadian.” The excerpt from Participant 3’s interview on page 55, for example, illustrates this. Even though Participant 3 has “adopted to Canadian culture,” which makes him “not Brown,” he is aware that people identify him as “Brown” because of his skin colour. Moreover, participants express a reality in which their identity is questioned on the basis of belonging: participants recalled being asked where they are from. This bespeaks the idea that non-White bodies in Canada are not considered to be “Canadian.” Rather, there is an assumption that a non-White is an “Other;” they are “perpetual foreigners.” Similarly, Participant 2 recalled an instance where he was told to “go back where [he’s] from.”

This chapter builds upon scholarly conversations on navigating the seemingly oppositional identities of “Canadian” and “Brown” (Sundar, 2008; Shariff, 2008; Guzder, 2011), and it explores how “Brown” youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) navigate
these identities. This chapter finds that while these youth “live at the juncture of two cultures[,]” they “can lay claim to belonging to both culture” (quoting Lafromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993, p. 4, in Shariff, 2008, p. 77).

**Navigating Compartmentalized Identities**

This study confirms and extends the findings of studies that have been conducted on the identity of “South Asian” and “Brown” immigrant youth (Sundar, 2008; Shariff, 2008; Guzder, 2011), as it finds that 1.5-generation “Brown” youth in the GTA express their identities as “Brown,” “South Asian” (or more specifically, Pakistani, Indian, and Sri Lankan), and “Canadian.” However, participants demonstrate difficulty in expressing a “Brown” and a “Canadian” identity; the two identities don’t seem to fit together smoothly. For example, Batman identifies as “a South Asian-Canadian” because “…ethnically, [he’s] Brown, but [he also] identity[ies] [him]self as Canadian.” Further, Batman insists that because everyone in Canada is “Canadian,” he would not identify just as a “Canadian;” he needs “to use a second identification,” which is based on his ethnicity.

Batman: …everyone here is Canadian, so you wouldn’t call yourself Canadian. You would – you have to use a second identification thing. So you are Brown, right. You know what I’m sayin…like when you chill with your friends, you’re the Brown girl, right. Are you not? [laughs] I’m wondering. Are you not?

AR: I am.

Batman: Like, yea, that’s what I am too. I’m the Brown guy.

Participants understand their identities in separate compartments because the discourse of liberal multiculturalism and a White Canadian identity do not provide space for a person to be “Brown” and “Canadian” at the same time. This study utilizes the
concept of hyphenated identities to engage with the idea of being “Brown” and being “Canadian” on the one hand, and being unable to meld these two identities, on the other hand. A hyphenated identity is understood as an identity that cannot be articulated using only one identity because neither “Brown” nor “Canadian” capture the complex identity of the 1.5-generation youth who were interviewed in this study. A hyphenated identity such as “Brown-Canadian,” then, is necessary because “Brownness” does not fit neatly in the identity of “Canadian,” nor is there space for “Brownness” in the discourse of liberal multiculturalism and the Black/White dichotomy.

Sundar (2008) uses the concept of hyphenated identities to navigate the contradiction between being “Brown” and being “Canadian.” While participants in both Sundar’s study and in this particular study identify with “Canadian,” they also used “Canadian” to describe people who are White. For example, Participant 3 calls himself Canadian, but when asked what “Canadian” means, he mentions stereotypes that he does not adhere to. In the end, Participant 3 defines “Canadian” as “…just being able to follow what you want and stuff.” Therefore, he “chose to follow nothing” (Participant 3).

However, it is evident that Participant 3 was having difficulty when trying to reconcile the two identities. When trying to explain the difference between “Brown” and “Canadian,” for example, Participant 3 draws comparisons between the country where he was born, Sri Lanka, and Canada:

…the culture here is a lot different from like Sri Lanka, where I’m from and stuff, so, um……it’s just like everything to do is just different, like the way you……uh……it’s just like the things you do here are different from the things you do there. It’s more like, it’s more like religious stuff, it’s more like strict in that sense, but here it’s more open, and I’m not really that religious.
Further, Participant 3 expresses the opinion that other people see him “…just like a Brown person, like the stereotype of Brown…” In the end, however, Participant 3 also adheres to a hyphenated identity because it allows both identities that he subscribes to, to be articulated.

Participant 2’s comments also illuminate the ambiguity of a “Brown” identity as well as the complexity of navigating these seemingly unconnected identities, and he also claims a hyphenated identity: He is “…a little bit of both, like Brown-Canadian” (Participant 2). Moreover, Aang makes sense of the two identities in the following way:

[t]he main person would be just someone – someone who goes to school, obviously someone who has a family. They eat together. They – they – they go to the- they go to school to get an education, then they start working. Their lives are just – are a normal routine. I would have to say it’s bland. I mean, I’m not saying that lots of people don’t have culture. Other people do have culture. They have different types of culture though. Mine would be Indian and Canadian. Other people would just be Canadian. Other people would be Asian and Canadian. Others would just be Asian. I don’t think anyone has just that person. Just that bland self because they always have something on top of [it].

...Canadian – uuuuh, just – kind of being, being peaceful. Not, like, being. I guess it’s kind of a cliché to go skiing – to – to, to do all of that kind of stuff. To wear plaid, but, uuh, but I guess it’s true cuz Canadians do do that and it’s not out of the ordinary. That’s what we do. And that – that’s how I consider myself Canadian. Um, it’s not like I’ve culturally changed myself. I’ve just added these things to who I am. So I’m also a skier, I’m also - I also wear plaid. It’s my style. You know (emphasis added).

Aang’s understanding of being “Brown” and being “Canadian” is similar to Batman’s. Both of these youth describe “Brown” and “Canadian” as distinct, yet they build upon one another; they are not contradictory identities, but are different identities.

Accordingly, Aang is “Brown” and is also “Canadian.” In the following section, I utilize Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness, and scholarly commentary on this concept, to
further unpack and analyze the complexity, significance, and impact of claiming two seemingly contradictory racial identities.

‘Multiple Souls Warring In One Body’

Du Bois utilizes the notion of double consciousness to explore the nuances of the African-American experience and identity in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although Du Bois was writing in a vastly different context, at a different time, and in a different geographic location, he was writing about what it means to be “Black” in a White world; he was trying to reconcile the idea of being “Black” and being non-Black. Similarly, “Brown” students understand themselves in relation to Whiteness, as schools are an institution of the State that operate within the logics of White supremacy (this discussion is elaborated on in Chapter 5: Negotiating A Brown Identity In A Space Of Whiteness (In Schools)). To understand how this influences their identity, this paper utilizes Du Bois’ (1903) notion of double consciousness.

Du Bois (1903) defines double consciousness as “...this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others...” (p. 8). He argues that this dual identity creates mental conflicts within an individual. When Du Bois (1897) first used the term “double consciousness” to discuss issues of race in 1897, it was not a new term. Rather, it came with a myriad of meanings, specifically from the discourses of psychology and transcendentalism (Dickson, 1992). In psychology, “double consciousness” was used as a diagnostic term for split personalities. In this context, the two personalities of a person were separate, they were not aware of one another, and they were irreconcilable. There

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29 This is a take on Du Bois: “two souls, warring in one dark body” (Du Bois, 1897/1903).
30 My intention is not to dehistoricize the experiences of non-White bodies, and particularly of Black bodies. Rather, my reading of Du Bois (1903) allows me to understand and apply his ideas to a non-White experience, and specifically, to a Brown experience.
was “a real opposition between the two consciousnesses confined within a single body” (p. 304). Similarly, in transcendentalism, “…the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul…really show very little relation to each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves” (p. 300 using Emerson, 1940). Also, William James, who was a mentor to Du Bois, was writing on “‘alternating selves’ or ‘primary and secondary consciousness’” (Dickson, 1992, p. 304). Taking this context into account, along with a reading of Du Bois’ (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dickson (1992, p. 301) writes that Du Bois uses “double consciousness” to refer to the real power of white stereotypes in black life and thought…the double consciousness created by the practical racism that excluded every black American from the mainstream of the society, the double consciousness of being both an American and not an American…

Thus, there are differences between Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness and its use in scholarship that pre-dated Du Bois’ use of the term. When used in relation to split personality, neither personality was thought as being more “normal” or functional in society than the other. This paper’s understanding of double consciousness with regard to non-White identity is that while neither consciousness is “normal” or fully functional in society, the White consciousness will be more accepted and thus is viewed to be more “normal” and/or more functional.

Further, in both psychology and transcendentalism, the two souls were incompatible (p. 304-305). While these two souls were irreconcilable, it was recognized by experts that they were “different but equally functional ways of dealing with the world” (p. 305). With regard to Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness, Moore (2005) views the space between the two consciousnesses as a space where one “must generate a
fever of resistance” (p. 753). Accordingly, he recommends a departure “from a double consciousness and [a] focus on a single-minded consciousness to rescue, to reconstruct, and to revitalize the minds of those who have been miseducated” (p. 762-763). This call is similar to Du Bois’ (quoted in Dickson, 1992, p. 306) proposal for the reconciliation between the two consciousnesses, between the “African” self and the “American” self. This would happen by merging the two selves into “a better and truer self” without losing either of the selves. This is also similar to what William James had proposed as an end to “alternating consciousnesses:” “…not the victory of one over the other but a process whereby ‘the dissociated system come together,’ resulting in a third, new Self, ‘different from the other two, but knowing their objects together’” (James quoted in Dickson, 1992, p. 306).

Of late, there have been quite a few critiques of Du Bois’ (1897) notion of double consciousness as a way to understand the mental conflict within non-White bodies that are living in a White world (Kirkland, 2013). The critiques have been focused on the idea that there is a lack of a causal relationship between what Du Bois calls “the veil” (racial segregation and colonization) and the psychological conflicts inside the mind of a “Black” person. However, Kirkland writes that the literature that critiques double consciousness “denies that [it] is pivotal to either Du Bois’ thought or the identity of blacks as a whole” (p. 137). Moreover, the premise of these critiques is an example of

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31 See Lawrence Bobo (2000), who argues that double consciousness is inconsequential because Du Bois’ focus was not on double consciousness, but it was on the economic effects of racism on Blacks. See Ernest Allen (2002) whose critique is based in the position that double consciousness is ambiguous and that it is not supported by any empirical evidence. So, rather than having any merit, it was employed as a tactic by Du Bois to "allay the unease of black elites…to the possible foreclosure of continued respect and patronage for their talents from white elites" (Kirkland, 2013, p. 138). See Adolph Reed (1997), who dismisses double consciousness based on its applicability and relevance to today’s time. He argues that the concept is neither valid not applicable, although it may have been so in the past.
how the logics of Whiteness are exercised. How can the experiences of an individual be denied? By denying Du Bois’ experiences, as well as the experiences of other non-White bodies that adhere to the notion of double consciousness, to any extent, the message that is being sent is that race is an irrelevant part of their identity, thus invalidating their experiences.

Using the notion of double consciousness, this study argues that the discourse of liberal multiculturalism hinders a “Brown” identity from emerging primarily because liberal multiculturalism is articulated within the logics of White supremacy. As detailed in Chapter 2, the official policy of multiculturalism was conceptualized at a socially and politically unstable time in Canada, and it was a way to silence the voices of non-Whites. Thus, liberal multiculturalism is an ideology that was created under a false premise. It is an ideology that was created within the logics of Whiteness, so the space that multiculturalism allows for non-White bodies is a space that often results in mental conflict for the non-White bodies. For example, liberal multiculturalism has created the notion of “authentic” identities, and non-White identities must fit within these notions of “authentic.” When non-White identities do not fit within the “authentic” identity that is created by Whiteness, the non-White identity is thought of as invalid (Bedard, 1999, 21 using Deloria, 1992, p.399; see the discussion around Russell Peters in Chapter 2). Further, identity is shaped and reshaped “…through the signifying practices [students] engage in” (Sayani, 2010, p. 33). This is another example of how Euro-centred Whiteness is the norm and how racial identities are constructed in relation to Whiteness.

As discussed in this paper thus far, in its current iteration, liberal multiculturalism has resulted in the exoticization and essentialization of non-Whites. This chapter has
argued that “Brown” youth develop multiple consciousnesses, which is one effect of identity development in the context of Canadian liberal multiculturalism. This is because Brown youth’s identities are developed through multiple sources, as was also articulated by Desai & Subramanian (2000). They are perceived in different ways: society perceives them based on the continuum of Whiteness, people who self-identify as “Brown” perceive them in relation to “Brownness,” and their family/close friends perceive them in yet another way. Moreover, the youth are aware of these multiple perceptions and they ask themselves the following: how do they perceive themselves in relation to Whiteness, how do they perceive themselves in relation to Brownness, and how do they perceive themselves in relation to their family/close friends?

To conclude, “Brown” youth have a complex and shaky relationship with Canadian identity because while they desire to belong to the Canadian nation, they are bombarded with reminders that they are racialized as “Other.” This is evident in interviews when youth use the term “Canadian” to mean the same thing as “White.” As written by Sundar (2008), “[y]ouths’ tenuous connection to a Canadian identity…reflects the fact that the color of their skin means that others so not see them as real (‘white’) Canadians” (p. 263). So, participants recognize that they cannot claim an authentic Canadian identity because of their skin colour, and they gravitate towards the concept of hyphenated identities in order to navigate this contraction between “Canadian” and “Brown,” specifically expressed within a logic of liberal multiculturalism that claims a Canadian identity is accessible to all.
CHAPTER 5
Negotiating A Brown Identity In A Space of Whiteness (in Schools)

This study understands the social institution of the school as representative of greater Canadian society, which is fundamentally a “British settler society.” British colonists and colonial administrators established many of Canada’s dominant institutions, which continue to be used today (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 369). The current education system perpetuates and reinforces the idea of Whiteness as the norm, on which the first Canadian schools were established. This is evident in the structure of the education system, from what is considered formal curriculum to the dress code, teaching strategies, and the general attitude of educators towards non-White students. For example, schools usually do not offer “ethnic” sports such as cricket for students to participate in, and they also tend to perpetuate stereotypes of “Others,” such the notion that Muslims are terrorists and evil (Kilbride et al., 2001). The systemic, discrete, and multi-dimensional nature of Whiteness operates through such everyday practices that perpetuate countless inequities. For example, teachers often have lower expectations of immigrant students or “Black” students than they do of other students (Kilbride, et al., 2001). This attitude results in the lower academic achievement of students (Dei, 1996). Further, the knowledge that is presented as “authentic” or/and “valid” in schools tends to be Eurocentric knowledge. Think of whose history is taught in public schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): it is a Eurocentric re-telling of Canada’s history and it does not incorporate the history of non-Europeans. Banks (1993) refers to these White norms of education as “mainstream academic knowledge,” which is constructed of so-called “objective” knowledge; the
official curriculum\textsuperscript{32} is constructed of precisely this “objective” Eurocentric knowledge. However, educators rarely question the norm of Whiteness in education (p. 8-9).

Although Leonardo (2009) is writing in an American context, his argument that “the very presence of multiculturalism is evidence of a reaction to a white normativity in school curricula, administrative structures and classroom interactions” is relevant to the Canadian context (p. 129). The participants of this study provide a great example to demonstrate the extent to which the logics of Whiteness infiltrate the education system. When discussing racism that has been encountered in their respective schools, the participants discuss instances that include Brown educators, both as the instigator of a racist situation and as the victim of a racist act. Aang spoke about his mother’s experience in the teaching profession in the Inner suburb where they live. His mother had been working at one particular school for a few years, but she was not being promoted. Instead, teachers who had been at the school for a shorter period of time than her were being promoted. On top of this covert discrimination, Aang recounts some racist comments that the principal of the school had made towards his mother. The overt racist comments made to Aang’s mother make this a clear instance of the systemic racism that is present in schools.

Moreover, Participant 1 and Aang both spoke about encounters they had with “Brown” educators, and these encounters were characterized as being negative. Aang’s high school is populated by a majority of White teachers, with a sprinkling of non-White

\textsuperscript{32} By “official curriculum,” I am referring to the content that is taught in schools. Teachers are expected to follow curriculum documents and they are expected to teach the curriculum expectations that are contained within the curriculum documents. PDF versions of Ontario’s curriculum documents can be found at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html.
teachers in the staff. He shared one experience he had with a Brown teacher, who he
encountered in Grade 9 French class:

Aang: ...one time I’ve had a Brown teacher, but he wasn’t even my
permanent teacher. He was just a substitute teacher for just one month. He
was just a weird person. Like most Brown teachers I’ve met, I don’t care.
It’s not that I don’t care, it’s that it doesn’t bug me, it doesn’t affect me, but
this person was just weird and he was hard on me just because I was Brown
just like him and I – I – I – it was annoying, it was just really annoying. And
he was telling everyone I was his cousin, and that was getting really stupid.
Yea, I thought that was like really dumb.

Aang: He was just really annoying to everyone. I guess that was just his way
of picking on me. I don’t – I don’t – I don’t think that he was just hard on
me, I guess he was just giving everyone a really tough time. That was his
way of picking on me. He probably had other ways of picking on other
people.
AR: Yea. By saying you’re his cousin?
Aang: Yea.
AR: How did that st - sorry. I’m curious to know how that started...
Aang: Yea. I know. Yea. I know. I guess because I was the only Brown
person in the class. Um, most people don’t really care in my school, but I
guess this teacher noticed, and that he got - used that – I dunno, it was just
weird.
AR: How did you deal with that situation?
Aang: I dunno. I was just talking to my friends, and they thought it was
weird and I was like, yea he was weird and I guess we – we just all reached
the conclusion that it was weird, and – we don’t really care about that
because he won’t be coming back.

Similar to Aang, Participant 1 also characterized her experience with a “Brown” educator
as a negative one. She told me of her discomfort with having a “Brown” principal, who
she identified as “apparently Brown,” using air quotes around “Brown.” She also states
that “…it’s better to see like a white principal……or a black principal.” When questioned
about why this is the case, she said, “that’s just how people think, even all my friends.”
As the conversation progressed, Participant 1 gave the following explanation for why it is
not ideal to have a “Brown” principal:

Participant 1: It’s weird having a Brown principal. Maybe because we’re
Brown, so we feel that we shouldn’t have a Brown principal……?
AR: Do you think that a Brown principal would treat you differently because they're Brown as well?
Participant 1: Yea. That’s true. They do.
AR: In a good way, or a bad way?
Participant 1: In a good way. They do treat you differently. Like [1-2 second silence] – It didn’t happen with me. It happened with one of my friends, like she waiting in the office to go talk to the principal and there were different race people sitting, and then she was the last person, and then people were before her. And yet he seen her first, and he was like come in my office and we’ll talk. So she came and left and she got in first. That’s kinda not fair, you know.
AR: Yea, and you guys don’t like that?
Participant 1: No.
AR: So you think that if there was a black principal, or a white principal –
Participant 1: They, like [a second silence] or probably, yea, like, it’d be equal, I think.

In a society that is structured around Whiteness, it is not commonplace to see a “Brown” person in a powerful or authoritative position, such as that of a school principal. “Brown” principals are rarely seen in popular culture, whether on television shows or in movies, nor is it common to see “Brown” principals in real life. Accordingly, it is unlikely that Participant 1 has prior experience with a “Brown” principal, so when she encountered a “Brown” principal in her school, she struggled to navigate that interaction. This bespeaks the contradiction that is inherent to a Canadian identity. Given that a Canadian identity is constructed as an identity of Whiteness, to be considered “Canadian” means to possess Whiteness. In Canadian society, only an identity of Whiteness can possess and enact power and authority, so Participant 1’s “Brown” principal would have to enact Whiteness in his position of power and authority. Participant 1 would have been conflicted about how to navigate encounters with her “Brown” principal, who was “Brown” on the one hand, but who was White on the other hand: should she act the way that she would with a White principal, whose authority comes from his/her position as a principal, or should she interact with the principal and his authority as she would interact
with one of her “Brown” Uncle’s and his authority, which stems from the fact that he is an older “Brown” man?

I utilize Subedi’s (2008) study to further unpack Participant 1’s reaction to having a “Brown” principal. Subedi interviewed two immigrant teachers, one who migrated from India and another who migrated from Pakistan, to explore how they negotiate teacher identities and cultural identities in school. He argues that the dominant discourse of what/who can be an “authentic” and “legitimate” teacher is developed within the hegemony of Whiteness, and that the norm of Whiteness “Others” and marginalizes non-White teachers. For example, Subedi writes that, Nadia’s (who had been living in America for 12 years) “brown skin color clearly stood out in a school where white teachers were an overwhelming majority[...and that her] ethnic/cultural identity (body image, etc.) as well as linguistic style influenced the ways in which she was represented as a less legitimate educator” (p. 62). Thus, although Nadia was in a position of authority as a teacher, she had less authority than a White teacher because she was not White. This finding is similar to the “Brown” youth who were interviewed in this particular study because they are also navigating a fragile and ambiguous “Brown” and “Canadian” identity. Also, Subedi’s discussion around the reality that an “authentic” teacher is a White teacher is helpful in understanding Participant 1’s discussion around her “Brown” principal: being “Brown” and being a principal are seemingly contradictory subject positions to hold.

However, “Brownness” can also create a sense of connection between students and teachers. Participant 1 shared the daily racism experienced by a “Brown” teacher at her
school. In this instance, she was defending the teacher and was condemning the actions of the instigators, who were non-Brown students:

Participant 1: …there’s this one teacher that everyone thinks that she’s racist, that she’s only nice to Brown people and that’s not like her, like she’s gonna be nice to everyone if they’re nice to you, so other – the Black kids in our class, not being racist, but the Black kids in our class say that she’s only nice to you guys cuz you guys are Brown cuz she’s Brown. And then the other race people start fighting with the teacher and the students get suspended for starting racism.

AR: Oh, so they start having arguments with the teacher?
Participant 1: With the teacher.
AR: Saying that she’s racist?
Participant 1: Because she’s talk – she’s respecting the people who respect her.

Here, Participant 1 distinguishes herself from her “Black” peers, as it is the “Black” students who are making racist comments towards the “Brown” teacher:

… people who’ve known her know that she’s not. You know what I mean? Like, she’s in a, obviously gonna respect the person who respects her. If someone doesn’t listen to her in her class, she’s not gonna bother with them. And then, so like, apparently this Black kid will act up in our class so she just puts them aside and like I’m not gonna work with you. She tells them things two or three times. Like if a Brown person were to do the same thing, she would treat them the same thing, be like I don’t wanna talk again, I don’t wanna listen to you, but if the Brown person comes in on time, does their work, comes in during lunch time for extra help and everything, she’d be respecting them more other than the other person who’s coming in, you know what I mean (Participant 1).

This study finds that the discourse of liberal multiculturalism actively works to veil the norm of Whiteness, specifically through its discourses of diversity, colour blindness, and meritocracy. A reoccurring theme in the interviews is the participants’ denial of racism in their immediate surroundings. Each participant expressed the idea that their school is unique because while they spoke about racism as a reality for many non-White bodies in Canada, they maintain the position that racism does not exist in their school and that it does not affect their educational experiences as “Brown” youth in the
GTA. This chapter argues that schools are spaces of Whiteness, and it discusses how “Brown” youth navigate such spaces.

(The Failures of) Liberal Multiculturalism In Schools: Whiteness In Disguise

The discourse of liberal multiculturalism allows Canadians to live in ignorance of the realities of racism because it absorbs everything non-White into its framework; the language of diversity is one of the “tools” that perpetuates this. As Bedard (1999) discusses, discourses of liberal multiculturalism understand racism primarily “as the product of ignorance” (p. 25). Ironically, this framing re-centres the person making a racist comment since it focuses attention on that person’s intentions rather than investigating the effects of that comment on others. This creates a cyclical relationship as it perpetuates individual and societal racism, discrimination, and prejudice, which is necessary to the maintenance of Whiteness. hooks (1992) expertly discusses this in relation to identity: “The contemporary crises of identity in the west, especially as experienced by white youth, are eased when the “primitive” is recouped via a focus on diversity and pluralism which suggests the Other can provide life-sustaining alternatives” (p. 25, in Bedard, 1999, p. 25). Thus, the discourse of liberal multiculturalism sustains Whiteness “on the backs of non-[W]hite people,” which is how Whiteness was created in the first place (as is discussed in Chapter 2).

“Celebrations” Of Diversity

All five participants describe their respective schools as multicultural. This characterization is based on the racial make-up of the student body and the staff, and on
the cultural and religious days that the school(s) celebrates. For example, Participant 1 describes ISHS as being multicultural

[b]ecause, even if there’s Christmas, Diwali, or…New Year – any, any, anything that has to do with cultures, everyone celebrates it. Yea, like they all participate. If it’s like, Diwali, everyone’s wearing suits. Even the other culture people will like try fitting in, come to the dances.”

ISHS hosts a Multicultural Show as well as an Asian Show. The Multicultural Show takes place during school hours, and “[p]eople do performances from their…countries…..and…..sing songs and that kind of stuff” (Participant 3). The Asian Show, which did not happen this year, takes place after school, “and a lot of people show up to that, but I guess……it was Asian people, you know, more Asian people” (Participant 3). In addition to a Multicultural Show and an Asian Show, ISHS also hosts an annual Black History month Assembly.

Educators have critiqued these types of “celebrations” for their tokenistic nature. For example, educators have criticized Black History Month for its tokenistic nature because it is a month. Is Black history an add-on to Canada’s history and to the experience of Canadians, or is it a part of our history? Moreover, during Black History Month, students (and teachers) are taught about the same voices: Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks (or if Canadian students are lucky they will learn about Viola Desmond), and other “famous” Black figures. Also, the struggles of those figures are not historicized, they are not contextualized, and their fights for equality are individualized and attributed to the individual actors. Accordingly, Rosa Parks did not one day decide that she was going to challenge segregation – her actions were part of a larger movement that was occurring locally and nationally, but students do not learn this. Participant 1’s interpretation of a Black History Month assembly is the following:
They just talked about not to be racist and respectable and treat everyone equally and everything. And nobody really follows it…It’s really hard for, especially for our school [to follow it] because we are all divided up mostly. Like ……..I dunno how to explain it.

From the above quote, it seems that even students are aware that multicultural “celebrations” do not serve an educational purpose, nor do they bring Canadian education or society closer to becoming more aware of racial inequities.

Rezai-Rashti (1995, p. 17-26) discusses five pedagogical approaches to how multiculturalism is enacted in schools. “Celebrations” of diversity, such as an Asian Show, fit within the pedagogy of multiculturalism that is labeled “education promoting the understanding of cultural difference.” The underlying notion of “education promoting the understanding of cultural difference” is that racism will end if tolerance and acceptance of differences are taught in schools (Bedard, 1999, p. 19 using McCarthy, 1995). The fault of this approach is that it is founded within the logics of liberal multiculturalism, which does not have the ability to critically discuss race and racism because it takes Whiteness as the norm. As a result, teaching cultural differences will likely result in an “us/them” binary in which Whiteness is at the centre and everything non-White is relegated to the margins. This is another factor that makes it difficult for Brown youth to express an identity that speaks to their experiences as “Brown” and “Canadian” (see Chapter 4).

Further, “education promoting the understanding of cultural difference” attempts to tackle racism by challenging and disrupting stereotypes. However, this cannot be done without considering the historical and social processes that “locate racism in biased ideas and assumptions in people’s minds[,] such as] prejudiced attitudes, stereotypes, and lack of information about non-white people” (Bedard, 1999, p. 20). This is because doing so is a
way to see that Whiteness is constructed in opposition to the “Other.” An Asian Show does not address race or racism, and it in fact “create[s] a space which often exhibit[s] essentialist representations of differing cultures based on nostalgic notions of the past” (p. 19). Thus, an Asian Show perpetuates the racist and colonial view that there is something essential and fixed about cultures, leaving minimal space for the reality that cultures are constantly changing based on factors such as social interactions. Another problematic of hosting cultural shows is that “[t]here is a danger in representing cultures as only a thing of the past because it negates their existence in the present” (p. 20). This is one of the central effects of the discourse of multiculturalism in which “cultures are depicted as frozen in time, as static and unchanging” (p. 20). “Brown” youth in the GTA may look like Bollywood stars during Asian shows, but that is not what they look like when they come to school on a daily basis; there is no one thing they all adhere to – there is no essence. Moreover, cultural “celebrations” overemphasize certain characteristics of a culture, which becomes an essence of said culture, resulting in the view that all “Brown” people, for example, are “‘monolithic entities possessing uniform, discernible traits’” (McCarthy, 1995 p.28 in Bedard, 1999, p. 20).

**Racial Tensions**

The high schools that participants attend are comprised of a substantial population of non-White bodies, primarily “Black” bodies and “Brown” bodies. However, an important point to remember about the representation of race in schools is that even when non-White bodies make up majority of the student population, the school is still operating inside of a culture of Euro-centred Whiteness: the norms and values within schools are
based on Whiteness and policies that create and sustain the school’s culture are also steeped in Whiteness (Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi, 2005, p. 59).

After interviewing participants who attend ISHS, it became apparent that there are clear racial boundaries within the student population that determine who one should and should not be seen with. This is evident in the excerpt from Participant 1’s interview:

*AR:* So, in your school, is it very cliquey? Is it like people hang out with people who are like them?
*Participant 1:* Yea. Yea.

*AR:* So are all of your friends what you would say is Brown?
*Participant 1:* Like, my best friend is Spanish, but like all my other friends — they’re Indian. But like I have other race friends that are really close, but it’s like, if you see us hanging out together, other people would like walk beside us and say ‘why are they all hangin out together.’ Because we’re from different places.

*AR:* What places are your other friends from?
*Participant 1:* Like, Jamaica. Guyana. Spanish. White.\(^{33}\)

*AR:* Oh, so, like, mix.
*Participant 1:* Yea.

*AR:* But at school, you try not to hang out with them, or you guys don’t hang out that much —
*Participant 1:* We just don’t hang out, like — if like, apparently we have corners [air quotes] for like every group at our school. So like Black area would hang out here, the other Indian would hang out here, the other Indian would hang out here — there’re different types of Indian, right. And Guyana, Pakistani, they all have their different corners and they would hang out at one place. So like…they’re supposed to be — If I was to go to the Black area corner and hang out there, they would be like, what are you doing here? You don’t fit in.

*AR:* Oh.
*Participant 1:* And they’d like tell you to leave.

What is especially interesting is that while Participant 1 sees a school environment that is strictly divided based on race, she does not let that stop her from befriending those who do not self-identify as “Brown;” she spends time with them outside of the school.

\(^{33}\) Note here that Participant 1 names countries (Jamaica, Guyana), a culture (Spanish), and then a race (White). This fits within the logic of liberal multiculturalism, as White is conceptualized as a heterogeneous label, while anything non-White and “Other” is exoticised and essentialized.
Similarly, when speaking of the racial divide at ISHS, Participant 3 says that

Black people hang out with Black people, Brown people hang out with Brown people, and I guess they don’t mix really well, but I don’t really find that much of a problem because, like, I was associated with, like, both ends, I guess… yea, I guess that’s it, so that like, there are like separations – there is separation.

Participant 2 also echoes this. He discusses the racial divisions at ISHS, but he also removes himself from the divides: “…then you see all – a couple of us mixing at the front…” It is interesting to note that while participants characterize ISHS as being divided based on race, they also speak of themselves as the exception to that on the one hand, while they describe their group of friends as being predominantly Brown on the other hand. This is a result of the discourse of liberal multiculturalism and what it means to be “Canadian.” Although “Brown” youth speak of their social circle as primarily “Brown,” by socializing exclusively with “Brown” peers, youth will be accepting the idea that their school is highly racially divided and that they are a part of that, which in turn further ruptures their Canadian identity because part of the Canadian identity is welcoming diversity. Moreover, given the reality that schools are spaces of Whiteness, “Brown” youth in the GTA form friendships with non-White students as one way to negotiate this space of Whiteness. Further, it is interesting to note that when asked if skin colour makes any difference in school, all three participants from ISHS said that it does not. This is interesting because the participants vividly describe the racial division that is visible at ISHS, but then they said that race does not matter.

The denial of the saliency of race is one of the problematics of liberal multiculturalism. It fits within the dominant ideology of colour-blindness, which Ghosh
(2011) calls the neoliberal response to multiculturalism. This ideology ignores the
existing power differences that are based on factors such as race, gender, ethnicity place
of birth, language, etcetera. The discourse of colour-blindness also perpetuates deficit
thinking that places the onus for students’ academic success or failure on the students
themselves, leaving the current system intact because it is not interrogated and it is seen
to exist in the background, as if it is neutral, organic, and outside of power and race
relations.

The Veiling Of Racism

The “Brown” youth who were interviewed for this study were not born in Canada,
but they were raised in Canada, and they consider it home. So, they have a desire to
belong to the Canadian norm. This desire is demonstrated in conversations that I had with
the youth around the denial of acts of everyday racism. This study argues that the
participants’ denial of everyday acts of racism is a result of the grand narrative of
Canada, which is the idea that Canada is an equitable, friendly nation that welcomes
immigrants with open arms. Accepting that racism exists would firstly rupture this grand
narrative, and secondly, it would crack their already unstable identity of “Canadian.”

While discussing instances of racism with “Brown youth,” the topic of race-based
jokes came up. Although participants assert that such jokes are a form of racism, they
also distance themselves from experiencing these jokes as racist:

*AR: Can you think of any examples of racism, that you're comfortable sharing?*
Participant 2: Uh – stereotypes I guess. When like, let’s say….like, when –
uuh, when Brown people are considered cheap, like not every Brown person
is cheap now. There’s a lot of other types of people that are cheap, not just
Brown people, so that’s kinda racist, I guess…Comedians, they think it’s
funny, but it’s like, some people actually consider it to be true, you know,
just – I dunno. Just stereotypes. All stereotypes I guess.
Here, Participant 2 touches upon the contradictions that are present within racial identities: they may be perpetuated although they are not true – race is a social construction. He sees that race-based stereotypes are used as the basis of many jokes, which are perpetuated by the media. However, he also views such jokes as racist because “some people actually consider [them] to be true” (Participant 2). Moreover, Participant 2 says that the reason such a stereotype, that “Brown” people are cheap, is racist is because “not every Brown person is cheap……there’s a lot of other people that are cheap.” This is one demonstration of the power of Whiteness; while Participant 2 knows that this stereotype is false, he inadvertently reinforces it.

Therefore, this study analyzes the participants’ dismissal of race-based jokes as one strategy that they use to respond to, and cope with, racism that is present in the liberal multicultural environment of the school. When Participant 2 discusses race-based jokes in his personal context (at school and amongst his friends) the certainty with which he deems such jokes as racist falters: “[They’re j]ust friendly jokes and stuff. Nobody really takes things like, seriously, basically” (italics added for emphasis) (Participant 2). It is evident that Participant 2 considers jokes that are based on racial stereotypes to be an example of racism, but when asked if racism exists at his school, he justifies such jokes as nothing more than jokes. Thus, racism is explained away in his personal context. This fits within the discourse of liberal multiculturalism, as stereotypes are normalized, non-Whites are essentialized, and people continue to struggle with how to make racism visible without having to take up a position as “victims” of racism.

Similar to Participant 2, when asked if racism exists in his school, Participant 3 immediately says that it does, but in the same breath, he explains it away:
Participant 3: Yeaa..but I don’t – like personally, I don’t really encounter it, I guess, because…well, it’s not – it’s nothing that I take to heart because it’s always jokes and stuff with my friends and stuff……

AR: So, does it exist in your school, even if you don’t encounter it?

Participant 3: It probably does, like, it’s like, no – no – no – it’s not perfect everywhere, so I’m pretty sure like people would so, um, happen to come across racist remarks and everything, but it’s not, nothing that like I’ve ever seen.

AR: Okay. So you haven’t been a victim of racism, and you haven’t seen racism around you either?

Participant 3: Well, stereotypical jokes and stuff, aside from that, no.

AR: Do you think the stereotypical jokes are racist? Like, would you term that as being racist?

Participant 3: I guess they are racist, but its - it’s nothing that, like nothing that bothers me. Like I don’t really care about it all that. I’m sure that people, like obviously people do get offended and stuff, but I’m just like, cuz it’s my friends and stuff, so I’m not gonna get too, like.

Participant 3 chooses not to take offense to racist jokes, or, in order to maintain a friendship with his friends, he chooses not to show that he is offended by them. He acknowledges that they are offensive and that people do “obviously” get offended, but because he hears these “jokes” from his friends, they do not bother him. So, while both Participant 2 and Participant 3 acknowledge that race-based jokes are racist, they do not take them seriously “cuz [they’re] my friends…..so I’m not gonna get too……” (Participant 3). This fits under the liberal multicultural logic that defines racism based on the intention(s) of the person/policy as opposed to the effect(s). So, even when racist jokes are directed towards either of these youth, assumingly under the logic that their friends are not racist, the youth assume that they are just joking. Further, even if Participant 3 hears these jokes from someone he does not know, he is not offended because it is just a joke – “I couldn’t take it seriously” (Participant 3).

Furthermore, the “common sense” characteristic that gets taken on by racist stereotypes results in the reproduction of colonial hierarchies. This happens, in part, as stereotypes continue to be re-inscribed onto skin colour. Moreover, the voice of the most
powerful person(s) within a “minority” group is represented in liberal multiculturalism, such as Russell Peters’ voice (refer to the discussion in Chapter 2) while the rest of the group is essentially silenced. When a “Brown” person is acting in a way that does not fit with the stereotype of being stingy, for example, it may be questioned and will be seen as an anomaly. That person may even be viewed to be “less Brown,” and “more White.”

The Canadian context is characterized by liberal multiculturalism, which perpetuates the discourses of colour-blindness and meritocracy, exoticizes non-Whites, and essentializes non-European cultures. It is in this context that “Brown” youth face, and rationalize, instances of racism. This need to rationalize racism bespeaks the difficulties that “Brown” youth face in a context where they are positioned based on their “Brownness,” but where they are also told that race does not matter.
CONCLUSION

This study has explored the racial identity of “Brown” amongst 1.5-generation youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). It has found that youth who identify as “Brown” use this term as an umbrella term that captures the diverse experiences within this racial category. Primarily, “Brown” is a multi-layered and ambiguous racial category that is both self-imposed and externally imposed by Canadian society. Moreover, the Canadian context is characterized by liberal multiculturalism in which Euro-centred Whiteness is the norm and “Brownness” is constructed as “Other” because it is outside this norm. Accordingly, Brown youth navigate their identities in relation to the norm of Whiteness in school.

Furthermore, participants in this study navigate their “Brownness” in spaces of Whiteness, which results in ambiguous and contradictory “Brown” identities. The ambiguousness that is characteristic of a “Brown” identity is largely the result of “Canadianness,” which is conceptualized as an identity of Whiteness. It is also a result of the Canadian context in which racial categories are constructed and understood within the Black/White binary. This silences “Brown” experiences and it stifles conversations that explore how “Brown” is a racialized identity. Finally, participants in this study were raised in Canada, so in addition to identifying with a “Brown” identity, they gravitate toward a Canadian identity. However, they speak of “Brownness” as an identity that is outside of “Canadianness.” To make sense of these seemingly contradictory identities, they articulate the hyphenated identities of “Brown-Canadian” and “South Asian-Canadian.”
Expanding Scholarship on “Brownness”

This study maps identities of “Brown” amongst youth in the GTA, and it argues for this category because it is how South Asian youth understand and define themselves. Given that this study is about students’ experiences in schools, this paper does not discuss specific alternatives to the current system and normative practices that perpetuate and reify racism because doing so is outside of its scope. However, bringing the voices, and thus validating the experiences, of “Brown” youth, is one purpose of this paper. Further, this work needs to be connected to pre-existing conversations about education reform, as well as to think about new reforms, because without that, this discussion is incomplete. Specifically, an interlocking analysis of “Brownness” and how it is (re-)negotiated in education should be undertaken, so that the different logics of White supremacy are unpacked.

While this study has situated its analysis in the Canadian education system, other institutions, such as the legal system and the health system, are also spaces of Euro-centred Whiteness. Further research should situate its analysis in other spaces of Whiteness to explore how a racial identity of “Brown” is navigated and negotiated. Doing so will advance the discussion of how “Brownness” is racialized in a Canadian context. Moreover, there is need for further research to be conducted on the identity of “Brownness” and the experiences of “Brown” youth in Canadian society, and specifically in large cities because it is here that immigrants tend to settle. As one study that does this, this study suggests that “Brownness” is expressed differently in Toronto than it is in other
large Canadian cities, such as Vancouver (Sayani, 2010; Frost, 2010). So, there is a need for research to be conducted on “Brownness” in Toronto.

I chose education as the site of analysis for this research because students spend many hours in school; this is where their primary socialization happens, so it is imperative that schools reflect and represent “Brown” identities in the curriculum and in the culture of schools. Accordingly, this study agrees with the recommendations that youth interviewed by The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) and The South Asian Women’s Centre (SAWC) made (see Desai & Subramanian, 2000, p. 71-72). These recommendations centre on changing the culture of schools so that it is more representative of all students, on exposing students and educators to cultures other than European cultures, and on integrating community and school. Particularly relevant to this study is the youth’s suggestion to “make the curriculum more inclusive” (p. 71). At the moment, there is minimal inclusion of “Brown” history in the curriculum; the history of “Brown” people in Canada, their experiences, accounts, contributions, and so forth are neither acknowledged nor represented in school. For example, as discussed prior in this paper, the Komagata Maru (see Chapter 2) incident has received little attention in the curriculum. This is unfortunate as this historical narrative informs the Canadian nation and “Brownness”; it is important for students and teachers to be aware of how “Brown” has been historically racialized. Moreover, the curriculum must accurately represent students’ countries of origin, as they are today, and not based on racist stereotypes. This leads to asking the question of who decides what knowledge is worth being taught and interrogating the knowledge that is taught through the curriculum.
Changing the culture of schools, bridging the gap between community and school, and exposing students and educators to cultures and knowledges that are not solely European entails curriculum reform at the level of public schools and in teacher education programs and professional development days. It is imperative that teachers engage with anti-racism so that they are cognizant of the impact that race has on a non-White student’s experiences in school and also so that they can unpack their own complicity in maintaining the system of White supremacy. This would be a start to disrupting the Black/White binary in discussions of racial identities and it would also challenge the Eurocentric norm that is present in schools.
REFERENCES


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Further Readings


Museus, S. D., & Kiang, P. N. (2009). Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research. _New Directions for Institutional Research_, 142, pp. 5–15.


Appendix A

NON-WHITE POPULATION IN TORONTO’S CMA

A large percentage of the population of the City of Toronto (49.1%), Mississauga (53.7%), Brampton (66.4%), and Markham (72.3%) self-identify as members of a visible minority group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentage of Population in Toronto's CMA that Identify as Visible Minority</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Toronto</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississauga</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brampton</td>
<td>66.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markham</td>
<td>72.30%</td>
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Percentage of Population in 4 Cities in Toronto's CMA that Identify as Visible Minority
Appendix B

SOUTH ASIANS ARE THE LARGEST VISIBLE MINORITY GROUP IN CANADA

• Of the entire visible minority population in Canada in 2011, 61.3% reported being South Asian, Chinese, and Black.

• Further, of the entire visible minority population, 25% identified as South Asian, which was the largest visible minority group in Canada in 2011 and also in 2006 (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011, 2013; Statistics Canada, May 2013).

• In fact, South Asians make up 4.8% of Canada’s entire population.
Appendix C

MANY SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANTS ARE SECOND- OR THIRD-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

Of the South Asian population,

- 30.7% are born in Canada (either second- or third-generation immigrants)
- 20.6% moved to Canada between 2006 and 2011 (first-generation immigrants)
- 1.5% are third-generation immigrants (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011, 2013; Statistics Canada, May 2013).

** A first generation immigrant would not have been born in Canada, a second generation immigrant would have been born in Canada, but either one or both of his/her parents would have been born outside of Canada, and a third generation immigrant would have been born in Canada and his/her parents would also have been born in Canada.

The Categories of Immigrants

Immigrants apply for immigration under one of four categories: Economic Class, Family Class, Protected Persons, or Other.

- The Economic Class includes people who are “skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial and territorial nominees. Being granted immigration under the Economic Class is based upon the points system, which places emphasis upon an economic criterion that awards an applicant a certain amount of points based upon factors such as one’s level of education, one’s knowledge of an official language, one’s age, one’s work experience, and one’s adaptability into Canada (Levitz, December 2012; Chagnon, July 2013).

- The Canadian Experience Class, and live-in caregivers, as well as their spouses or partners and their dependents”

- The Family Class includes “spouses or partners, dependent children, parents, grandparents and other close relatives sponsored by Canadian citizens and permanent residents”

- Protected Persons includes “government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees and persons who received protected person status in Canada as a result of a positive asylum claim”

- Other includes persons who do no qualify under the three categories but for who “there are strong humanitarian and compassionate considerations, or for public policy reasons” (Chagnon, July 2013, pp. 3).

In the years in which the participants of this study moved to Canada, as is the continued trend, over half of all immigrants who were granted entry into Canada applied through the Economic Class, with the second largest category of immigrants applying through the

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34 As an example of how the points system works, http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-factors.asp has a list of “selection factors” if one is applying as a federal skilled worker.
Family Class (21.5%), then Protected Persons, and finally Other (Migration: International, 2010 and 2011, July 2013).

**The Census divides the status of people in Canada into three categories: Canadian citizens by birth (these could be categorized as second- or third-generation immigrants), naturalized citizens (first-generation immigrants), and non-citizens. In 2011, 78.3% of people in Canada were citizens by birth, 15.8% of people in Canada was naturalized citizens, meaning that they immigrated to Canada, and 6% of people in Canada were not yet given the status of citizens (Statistics Canada, May 2013).
Appendix D

ANTI-RACISM

In the Canadian context, which is characterized by a policy of multiculturalism, there is an ongoing dialogue about the advantages and disadvantages of multiculturalism and anti-racism (Dei, 2011; Ghosh, 2011). This paper works with the possibilities of multiculturalism and it is cognizant that it is a work in progress, that it is not a static concept, and that it must adapt to the changing times (Kymlicka, 2011). Further, while multiculturalism focuses on embracing diversity and tolerating difference, anti-racism is “conceptualized to address systemic, structural inequities [with a] focus on power relations [and] a particular interest in racism” (Carr, 2008, p. 10). Accordingly, anti-racism scholarship explores issues such as the disproportionate push out rates of Black, Portuguese, and Native males from public schools and the overrepresentation of White and female bodies in the teaching profession. Given that this study is grounded within the multicultural context of schooling in the GTA, it utilizes an integrative anti-racism and anti-colonial framework. In light of this, integrative anti-racism is an appropriate framework for this study because it uses race as an entry point and because it provides space for a discussion of Brown experiences and/or identities, which liberal multiculturalism does not.

In line with using an integrative anti-racism framework, there are a few things for the researcher to keep in mind when unpacking the racialized experiences of Brown youth in education. First, the researcher must be reflexive and recognize his/her own complicities in the maintenance of an inequitable system. Second, White privilege must be interrogated since Whiteness is the norm in schools in Ontario. Finally, and of critical importance, is ensuring that one’s analysis recognizes the numerous markers of identity; using race as an entry point does not mean that gender, sexual orientation, ableism, class, etcetera do not influence and impact experiences (Dei, 1996; Dei, 2000; George & Ramkissoon, 1998). Rather, race is used as an entry point because it is rarely discussed and can be a politically sensitive topic, and without naming and talking about it, the hegemony of Whiteness will continue to cloak racism. Scholars such as Pon (2000) and Yon (2000) have critiqued anti-racism, suggesting that it takes up a narrow notion of identity because it focuses on differences between people and groups, and that it also (re-)creates and maintains a Black/White binary or a minority/majority binary (Carr, 2008, p. 10). To counter these critiques (see Dei, 2007), however, this study utilizes a broad notion of identity, and it situates identity within the notion of power; identity is not outside of power.

See for example Dei, G. et. al., 1995; Dei, G., 1997; Ontario, Royal Commission on Learning, 2005)
Appendix E

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

My name is Ayla Raza. I am currently a Masters student in the department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. As part of my degree, I am writing a thesis, for which I am interviewing participants in order to gain an understanding of, and familiarity with, their schooling experiences in the GTA.

As a teacher myself, I am interested in hearing the uncensored voices and experiences of students. With the GTA’s constant emphasis on multiculturalism, the opening of an Africentric school, and in a post-September 11, 2001 environment, it is important to speak to students and hear their realities. I am looking to recruit Brown students, between the ages of 16 and 19, who would be open to discussing their experiences in schools, as well as their thoughts on race and Canadian multiculturalism. Students should self-identify as Brown and be 1.5 generation immigrants (born outside of Canada and moved here before the age of 13).

If you know someone who might be interested in this project, please pass this along. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at ayla.raza@utoronto.ca. Also, shall you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by phone at 416-946-3273.

Sincerely, Ayla Raza
Appendix F

THE DIVERSITY OF OUTER SUBURB (BATMAN AND AANG)

53.7% of the total population identifies as a visible minority. The following table provides a further breakdown of this entire visible minority population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minority Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asian</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asian</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix G

INTERVIEWS

The first three interviews were conducted with Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 in a private room in a local community centre where the youth went to school. This space was a public space that granted privacy for a confidential interview to take place, and it was also familiar to the participants. The fourth interview, which was with Batman, was conducted in a private room in the local city library of the outer suburb. This location was chosen because it was a public location that allowed for the interview to take place in private. Also, it was a location that was familiar to Batman. However, the interview did not begin as scheduled, so it continued after the library closed. As a result, the last quarter of the interview took place in a public space. At first glance, the interruptions during the interview (such as having to change locations and then continuing the interview in a public setting) seemed problematic, but they made for a rich conversation. For example, while walking from the library to City Hall to continue the interview (a location that Batman chose himself), Batman engaged me in an informal conversation about race, racism, schooling, and the events of 9/11. He was asking me questions, and I was answering him. This tone continued throughout the interview. The fifth and final interview, which was with Aang, was conducted in his family’s home.

During the initial set-up of this study, focus groups, as well as interviews, were going to be used as a data collection method. The plan was to conduct a focus group and then conduct one-on-one follow-up interviews. The rationale to do so was two-fold. First, focus groups have the potential to redistribute the power imbalance between researcher and participant(s), and second, discussing personal matters such as race and identity in a confidential group setting without any “pressure” to speak may be more comfortable for participants than one-on-one interviews. Due to unforeseen circumstances, however, this did not come to fruition. When recruiting participants through a youth worker friend, there was a great deal of interest from students at ISHS, so a focus group of six participants was immediately scheduled. However, only one participant attended what was meant to be the focus group, resulting in a reverse in the planned research methodology, from starting with focus groups and moving on to individual interviews, to starting the research by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. Further, while many students from ISHS expressed interest in participating in this study, only four youth scheduled and attended interviews. While four students from this school were interviewed, only three of the interviews are used in this study. This is because the fourth participant did not fit the research criteria of being a 1.5-generation immigrant. At this point, it is important to mention that in exchange for participating in this study, the youth worker offered the students a few volunteer hours to use towards their mandatory 40-hours of community service that is a graduation requirement.
Appendix H

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear

I am a Masters student at the University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As part of my thesis for Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, under the supervision of Dr. Sherene Razack, I am looking for participants to share their experiences and opinions of their high school experiences in the GTA.

The purpose of this study is to bring the voices of Brown youth to the forefront, with the hope of then altering the current system in a way that is reflective of students’ lived realities. This research project would like to hear the participants’ opinions of race, racism, and Canadian multiculturalism, specifically within schools/education.

Conditions of Participation

Participants should be between the ages of 16 and 19, self-identify as Brown, not have been born in Canada (but migrated here before the age of 13), and be open to having an honest discussion of their experiences. Please bear in mind that by agreeing to participate in this study, participants understand that I will be using the data gathered for research purposes (identifying information will never be used). If you would like a copy of my research upon completion, please advise me. Finally, as participation is voluntary, and there is no financial compensation that is being offered, participants are free to withdraw from this study at any time (before, during, or after the focus group and/or interview). If participants do choose to withdraw participation from this study, I, Ayla Raza, can be contacted by phone, at 647-885-9076 or by email, at ayla.raza@utoronto.ca.

Expectations of Participation

Participation will consist of an hour and a half long group discussion, followed by a half an hour individual follow-up interview (all of which will be audio recorded). If participants feel uncomfortable discussing these experiences in a group setting, please contact me, and we can discuss solutions (i.e. create a pseudonym to use during focus groups). All communication will take place in English and the location will be set depending on individual preference. Please keep in mind that discussions that take place cannot be repeated to people outside the focus group. The reason for this is to ensure the anonymity of all participants. Please remember that if participants require counseling services after participating in this study, participants can contact me and I will provide you with a list of agencies that offer counseling services for youth.

Confidentiality

While the interviews will be recorded, only I and my supervisor, Dr. Sherene Razack, will have access to them. Any identifiable information will be locked in a secure location, and all electronic files will be encrypted. In order to ensure anonymity, a pseudonym will
be used in my thesis.

If at any time you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, Ayla Raza, at ayla.raza@utoronto.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Sherene Razack, at sherene.razack@utoronto.ca.

Lastly, shall you have any questions or concerns about the rights of a participant, please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by phone at 416-946-3273.

Please sign the attached form, and provide me with a mailing address/email address should you wish to see a copy of my thesis. The second copy is for your records.

Thank you very much for your help.

Ayla Raza

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Please complete the following to indicate your consent to participate in this study, and please keep a copy for your records.

I ___________ agree (on behalf of ____________, who is under my legal protection) to participate in the study described. (I am/The participant and I are) aware of what is expected and (I have/we have) had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and (my/his/her) participation. By signing this, (I agree/the aforementioned youth who is under my legal protection, and I, agree) to all the conditions outlined above, including the audio recording of the focus group and the interview.

Signature Date Address (if relevant)

I ___________ agree (on behalf of ____________, who is under my legal protection) to participate in the study described. (I am/The participant and I are) aware of what is expected and (I have/we have) had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and (my/his/her) participation. By signing this, (I agree/the aforementioned youth who is under my legal protection, and I, agree) to all the conditions outlined above, including the audio recording of the focus group and the interview.

Signature Date Address (if relevant)
Appendix I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following are possible questions/conversation prompts (that are relevant to interested themes) I would pose to participants:

- Describe the make-up of your school. Does everybody get along? Who/What people live in your area? Is this the same as in your school?
- Describe your group of friends (the make-up of your group of friends). Is there any beef with other groups of friends?
  - To get at tensions: Are they race-based?
- What happens when you see one of your friends get in trouble? Is it good? How do teachers react? Is this a good reaction? How do you feel?
- Do you feel “Canadian”? Do you feel Brown? Do you feel accepted in your classroom, in the school, etc.? Do you ever feel that you are being judged (because of your Brownness)? Do you ever change your behaviour (because of your Brownness)? How does all of this make you feel?
- What makes you feel Brown? Where does this term come from (define what it means to be Brown)?
  - Explore the terminology of “Brown,” as a way to get at students’ experiences.
- Is your Brownness accepted here? Do you feel “normal” (refers to “being Canadian” and “Canadianness”)?
  - To get at students’ feelings of acceptance, or of not being accepted.
## Appendix J

### INSTANCES OF EVERYDAY RACISM IN CANADA

The following chart was compiled after a brief internet search on racism in Canada, and it demonstrates that racism is in fact a reality in Canada. The search phrase used was, “racism in Canada.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Source (Author)</th>
<th>Act of Racism/Authors’ Opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Nov 2013</td>
<td>ocanada.com (Ishmael N. Daro)</td>
<td>A Jamaican-born restaurant owner decided to close her restaurant in Manitoba after encountering difficulties resulting from racism, such as customers refusing to eat in a restaurant owned by a non-White person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Nov 2013</td>
<td>ctvnews.ca (Jeff Keele)</td>
<td>(Same story as above, but with additional information) A restaurant owner in Manitoba decided to close her restaurant after encountering a number of difficulties because of racism in the town, including KKK threats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Nov 2013</td>
<td>huffingtonpost.ca (Fariha Naqvi-Mohamed)</td>
<td>The author, who is a Muslim-Canadian woman who dawns the hijab, recalls a racist encounter she and her husband accompanied their daughter and her friends to the movie theatre. The author asked another moviegoer to put her cellphone away during the movie. This request resulted in the author being called a “fucking terrorist.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Oct 2013</td>
<td>torontostar.com (Donna Yawching)</td>
<td>The author, who is a Black Trinidadian, writes about a racist encounter she had with a White woman over a parking spot. The result of the encounter was the White woman leaving the following note for the author: “Thanks bitch. You really further your stereotype.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Aug 2013</td>
<td>huffingtonpost.ca</td>
<td>In British Colombia, a group of Indo-Canadians was denied entry into a club. This group filed a Human Rights complaint, and each person was awarded $10 000 as a result of the discrimination that they experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Aug 2013</td>
<td>timescolonist.com (Aidan Pine)</td>
<td>Canadians pretend that racism does not exist in Canada, but it does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May 2013</td>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>The author speaks about racist stereotypes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Author argues that mainstream Canadian society does not view non-Whites as Canadians. Rather, they are viewed as perpetual foreigners; Non-White immigrants are not made a part of Canadian society.

A letter on school letterhead that targeted Black students and used “aggressive” language was circulating in a Toronto school.

Author’s son wants to have white skin because of comments that his peers made to him at school; Author suggests Canadians are threatened by immigrants because the perception is that immigrants are taking Canadians’ jobs.