

“WE CAME HERE FOR YOU”: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND NOTIONS OF
SUCCESS FOR FIRST-GENERATION AND SECOND-GENERATION STUDENTS AND
PARENTS IN A CANADIAN ETHNOBURB

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Abstract

This dissertation explores notions of success among racialized first- and second-generation high school seniors and their parents in the ethnoburb (Li, 2009) of Brampton, Ontario. Employing qualitative methods, the study analyzes data from four focus groups, twenty-two student essays, and fifteen students' interviews with their parents – along with project memos and research notes. It investigates the ways in which these families discuss success, the influence of parental engagement, and childrens' and parents' alignment or resistance to the prevalent social discourses of meritocracy and neoliberal success. Critical discourse analysis is the primary methodological approach, and analytical frameworks include critical race theory, sociology of education, and Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth (2005).

Findings reveal varied understandings of success, often centred on a university education and professional careers, and narrated as an intergenerational endeavor that will ensure financial stability, community well-being, and personal fulfillment. Motivated by their parents' sacrifices and efforts, the students reported a strong sense of responsibility to their families, perceiving their educational and career accomplishments as part of a collective and intergenerational effort. The 'sacrifice narrative' emerges as a significant motivator for students, and education was often cited as a key reason for family migration to Canada. The research indicates that while parents primarily support their children's education at home and focus on their academic performance, school administrators sought parental engagement through school-based volunteering. Findings suggest that expanded notions of the definitions and expectations of parental involvement are needed, with attention paid to the socioeconomic barriers these parents face.

The study also discusses the varied perceptions of community among parents and youths, with some noting feelings of belonging, while others, particularly racialized males, reporting experiences of social conflict and/or feeling unsafe in some contexts. The school environment emerges as a central site of the youths' community experiences, differing from their parents' focus on suburban life. Additionally, narratives of parental and student experiences in the community reveal some tensions and highlight the need for future research into social relations in this ethnoburb (Li, 2009) community. The study contributes to strengths-based understandings of success among first- and second-generation Canadian students and families, through Yosso's concepts of communal cultural wealth (2005) and critical race theory.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
Introduction: “We Came Here for You”: Parental Involvement and Notions of Success for First-Generation and Second-Generation Students and Parents in a Canadian ethnoburb	1
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>The Research Questions.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Positionality and Approach to Inquiry.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Introduction to the Chapters</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1: Setting the Context	8
<i>Community Sites for the Research</i>	<i>8</i>
The ethnoburb of Brampton	8
<i>Canadian Research on Schooling and Education</i>	<i>14</i>
Educational Mobility	14
Race Inequities in Education	17
<i>Parental Sacrifice and the Immigrant Bargain.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>25</i>
Chapter 2 Theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Community Cultural Wealth	27
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the Sociology of Education:.....</i>	<i>28</i>
CRT’s Origins and Three Main Tenets	29
CRT Challenges the Assumptions of Multiculturalism.....	35
CRT and Neoliberalism.....	38
Communal Cultural Wealth.....	40
<i>Summary</i>	<i>43</i>
Chapter 3: Methodologies.....	45
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Critical Discourse Analysis.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>The SSHRC-Funded “Sharing Experiences” Project</i>	<i>50</i>
A Description of the School	54
The Classroom, the Teacher, and the Students.....	55
<i>Parents and their children as first- and second-generation Canadians:</i>	<i>56</i>

<i>Research and Data Collection Process</i>	57
<i>Qualitative Research Methods</i>	60
Child/Parent Semi-Structured Interviews.....	64
The Parent/Caregiver Participants.....	67
Focus Groups.....	70
Written Reflections.....	75
Field Notes.....	77
<i>Summary</i>	78
Chapter 4: Parent Data: ‘Go to University’	80
<i>Introduction</i>	80
<i>Context for Understanding the Parent Interview Data: Parents’ Schooling and Educational Experiences</i>	81
Background: Parents’ Schooling Experiences.....	82
<i>Theme 1: Parental Perception of Community: ‘A Good Community’</i>	87
Inter-ethnic Relations in the Community.....	91
<i>Theme 2: The School and Parents’ Involvement in their Children’s Schooling: ‘They’ll Call Us If Anything Is Wrong.’</i>	99
Parental Involvement Among Respondents.....	103
<i>Theme 3: Parental Aspirations for their Children: Fulfilling the ‘Immigrant Bargain.’</i>	106
The Role of the Immigrant Bargain.....	111
<i>Summary</i>	122
Chapter 5: Student Data: Success, Sacrifice, and Parental Understanding of School Life	123
<i>Introduction</i>	123
<i>Students’ Notions of Success Reflect Dominant Discourses of Meritocracy</i>	124
‘Hard work’ is Key to Success.....	126
Students Express a Preference for University and for Professional Careers.....	129
Students and Parents Negotiate Career Directions.....	131
<i>The Sacrifice Narrative and How Students Understand their Parents’ Expectations for Them</i>	135
The Context of Familial Closeness.....	135
The Sacrifice Narrative.....	137
Educational Success is an Intergenerational Family Project.....	148
Students Perceive Their Parents Have a Poor Understanding of Their Lives and Schooling.....	150
Intergenerational Differences.....	150
<i>Student Perspectives on Parental Involvement</i>	153
<i>Youth Descriptors of their Community</i>	159
<i>Inter-Ethnic Relations in Brampton: Student Perspectives</i>	161
<i>Summary</i>	164
Chapter 6: Intergenerational Narratives, Notions of Success, and Implications for Research	166
<i>Introduction</i>	166
<i>Intergenerational Stories of Sacrifice, as Familial and Aspirational Capital</i>	167
<i>Parents’ and Children’s Views about the Community and Inter-Ethnic Relations</i>	170

<i>Meritocracy, Neoliberalism, and Notions of Success</i>	171
<i>Contribution to Critical Race Theory Scholarship</i>	175
<i>Summary</i>	178
<i>References</i>	179
Appendix A: Complete Description of the Sharing Experiences Project	216
Appendix B: Instructions for Final Reflection Assignment to Students (What Is Success)	224
Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions Asked by Students	226
Appendix D: Focus Group Questions and Prompts	228

Introduction: “We Came Here for You”: Parental Involvement and Notions of Success for First-Generation and Second-Generation Students and Parents in a Canadian ethnoburb

Introduction

This dissertation is about how racialized Canadian families in Brampton, Ontario (ON), think about education and success. For these suburban families with recent immigration experiences in Canada, education is seen as key to success. I will examine how first- and second-generation¹ families instill high educational aspirations in their children and how the children try their best to fulfill their parents’ hopes and expectations. I take up these topics through critical race theory (Bell, 2005, 2020; Crenshaw 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2020; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2019) and Yosso’s (2005) notion of community cultural wealth, because I believe that in contemporary Canada, a country with growing rates of immigration, and also growing rates of far-right racism and White supremacy (Jokic, 2020), theorizing racialization and producing scholarship that centres the voices of racialized people is a critical undertaking and part of a long-term project toward social justice.

During the school year of 2011–2012, I spent two days each week in a Grade 12 class at Streetsview High School.² The class was a pre-university social sciences course taught by a young South Asian Canadian teacher to a group of Asian, Brown, and Black racialized students. In this last year of high school, they had their futures on their minds, and for nearly all these students, their immediate future included plans to attend university. The school’s student

¹ The term ‘first-generation Canadians’ includes those born outside Canada who are now, or were once, immigrants to Canada. The usage of this term is consistent with Statistics Canada’s definition (Statistics Canada, 2019a). The term ‘second-generation’ refers to people born in Canada to one or two parents who were immigrants to Canada (also called first-generation Canadians).

² Pseudonym

population, drawn from the large surrounding suburban area near the school, reflected the community of Brampton, with a majority racialized population (Wang & Zhong, 2013), of which the largest group was South Asian. The school was situated in a brand-new building, opened only three years prior to the research, on a corner lot with a major road on one side, and uniform-looking brick low-rise townhomes and single-family homes lining local streets. In the mornings, the school's driveway and parking lot were full of parents dropping off their children, and the school interior was always bustling with activity; ads for school events played on screens in the halls. Students did not wear uniforms to school, but it was common to see a few students in class wearing shirts with the school's logo on them.

For this newly established school, and its new administrative team, it was important to fulfill the school's mandate, which spoke to 'contributing to global communities,' 'fostering inclusive community,' 'being socially responsible,' and 'supporting post-secondary pathways' (Peel District School Board, 2009). To this end, the school's principal initiated a relationship with the York Centre for Education and Community, the research unit at York University through which I helped to carry out this research. The "Sharing Experiences" project³ was developed to support the school's efforts to build an engaged and connected school community.

The Research Questions

In this dissertation, I will provide an analysis of how a group of racialized first- and second-generation students in Grade 12, and their parents, talked and wrote about schooling, education, and success, through an examination of research notes, focus groups, written reflections, and parent/child interview data. I am particularly interested in how these students and their parents integrated or resisted widely accepted ideas about success in North American

³ Details of this sshrc-funded project are included in Chapter 3.

society. The qualitative talk and written data will be analyzed using thematic and critical discourse analysis, rooted in a theoretical orientation toward critical race theory (CRT). My central research questions are:

1. How do these students and their parents talk and write about the markers of success?
2. How do these students talk about the roles that parental involvement, expectations, sacrifice, and knowledge play in their educational pathways?
3. How does what they say and write align with, or resist, dominant social discourses about success?

My goal in this work is to make a theoretical and analytical intervention into discourses of neoliberalism and meritocracy through critical race theory and Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth. The aim is to shed light on how race plays out in the suburban educational institution and in conversations between students and their parents.

My research in this dissertation is motivated by an academic and personal interest in the lives, cultures, and experiences of first- and second-generation Canadians living in suburban communities. It is no secret that many first-generation immigrant parents hope that Canadian society will offer their children opportunity, education, and the chance to improve their socioeconomic status. Somerville and Robinson (2016) found that "immigrant parents often exert authoritative influence on their children's educational paths" and that the "pressure to please their parents in order to impress the ethnic community" can cause intergenerational conflict between South Asian parents and their children. Yet, as James and Taylor's 2008 study shows, a desire to make their families proud and to use their achievements in service of community are often strong motivating factors for immigrant students' persistence in education. My analyses of both student and parents' talk and writing will pay close attention to the nuances, absences, or

instances of intergenerational differences and potential conflict. From my conversations with and observations of the students that are the subject of this dissertation, I know them to be first- and second-generation Canadians from families who, according to the students, consider educational attainment to be very important. Thus, I am interested in analyzing how these students perceived these dynamics in their lives.

Positionality and Approach to Inquiry

Social science researchers have long engaged in a practice of articulating their positionality in research, often including a reflexive statement about their social locations, epistemological, ontological, theoretical, or political beliefs, and/or other relevant aspects of how they came to the work and how they approach it (Holmes, 2020). As Holmes (2020) puts it, “positionality both describes an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (p. 1). Another often-used concept related to positionality is the ‘insider/outsider’ binary, where researchers discuss how they may be part of a shared community, ethnic, language or other identity group that overlaps with some or all of the participants in a given research project. They may also note ‘outsider’ status, in which the researcher articulates their social location as being different from the research participants’. The practice of articulating researcher positionality or information about their relationship to the research participants was already common when Robert K. Merton published a summary paper, in 1972, on the history and main ideas behind ‘insider doctrine’ and ‘outsider doctrine.’ In brief, the former holds that only those with a particular life experience or social identity can know and study it accurately and authentically, as only they have privileged access to the required knowledge; the latter tends to place primacy on the so-called objectivity of the outside observer (Holmes, 2020; Merton, 1972). Merton cautioned at the time that, of course, almost no one is a

total insider or total outsider, an idea that has been shared and critiqued by many social scientists who have taken up a more relational and intersectional approach to understanding researchers' positions in relation to the research and to those who are researched (Kerstetter, 2012; McRae, 2007; Merriam et al., 2001; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). I too consider it important to situate myself in the research and in relation to the communities and the people I study.

I share several social identities with the students and families in this dissertation. Perhaps most relevant to the area of focus of this research is that I am the oldest child of a first-generation Chinese-Canadian parent from Hong Kong who prized education above all else. I have been told more than once that my mother came to Canada in her teens and worked hard at many menial jobs so that I could have a good education, and hence, a good life. Growing up my mother was always working or studying. We never took a family vacation and leisure time was limited. The focus of most of our time was school, studying music at a high level to build discipline, and household/family responsibilities. There was a strong focus on self-discipline, hard work, and family obligation. I saw how my mother (and her sisters) took on responsibility for their parents and I was often given the message that education was the most important asset I could gain because it would be useful in all areas of life and could not be taken away.

My experience as the child of an immigrant, and my social location as a racialized young woman, at times helped to build rapport and easy conversation around parental expectations and educational aspirations between me and the students. I identify as a non-White (mixed race), able-bodied, cis-gendered woman, and speak English with a Canadian (Toronto) accent. I was not a member of the geographic community that I conducted research in, but I was not completely new or unfamiliar with the area, as I have attended family events and visited friends at family homes, in parks, and at community centres in Brampton.

In the year that I spent regularly sitting in the classroom with the students, I felt an affinity with their life circumstances, goals, and challenges, which were often similar to the experiences I had or ones I had seen young first- and second-generation racialized people in my family and community go through. I was very comfortable in the school and felt at home interacting with the students, in part because I had had many other experiences working with youth in school and community settings. These experiences impacted how I carried myself and interacted with the participants in this dissertation research. While the terms insider/outsider are perhaps dated and limited, I do want to acknowledge that I related to the students⁴ across several socially constructed aspects of identity, and that this relatedness enabled me to sustain a productive and positive working relationship with the students (Rowe, 2014) based on mutually understood ideas. At the same time, I am an outsider to their community for the most part, and there were many aspects of life in this community I did not share: I am not part of a large extended family; I do not speak my mother's language; I am not South Asian or Black, or a young man; I did not grow up in a suburban community; and I came of age in a different time and context.

An important goal of positioning oneself in social science and educational research is to be transparent and cognizant of how biases, lived experiences, knowledge, or aspects of one's worldview may influence the research. We cannot separate ourselves from the social world to

⁴ I believe the students related to me as well, and I take as evidence of this that they often started conversations with me first, smiled, said hi to me in the hallways, and/or had questions/ideas they wanted to share with me when I arrived. They asked me which days I would return the next week, and several of the young women students wanted to keep in touch with me at York University after the year was over. Some students emailed me to ask for information and advice about university courses during the year. I was also contacted on social media after the project ended by some of the students to ask for information about university, and in some cases, to tell me how they were doing and what they were studying. While I cannot be certain that they liked me, our interactions were always positive and friendly, and they often initiated the engagement with me, so I take this as evidence that we had mutually positive feelings of rapport.

study it (Hammerly & Atkinson, 1995; Holmes, 2020), and I applied to work on the original research project because I, like many social scientists, was motivated to examine personal experience with an academic lens. As a racialized person and a first-generation post-secondary student, I wanted to bring useful knowledge back to the communities whose sacrifice and hard work provided me with opportunities for schooling and education.

Introduction to the Chapters

The dissertation that follows consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 contains information that sets the context of the research: relevant information about Brampton and the local community, and a brief literature review of related research on first- and second-generation post-secondary students and their parents. Chapter two contains an overview of the theoretical frameworks for this dissertation: critical race theory (CRT), and Yosso's related notions of community cultural wealth (2005), which play an important role in the analysis of data in Chapters four, five and six. Also included in Chapter two are discussions of central concepts: neoliberalism, meritocracy, and multiculturalism, which I frame as having overlapping assumptions (for example, that of equal opportunity) that are challenged when considered through CRT. Chapter three is the methodology chapter. It includes a detailed description of the 'Sharing Experiences' project from which the data for this dissertation is derived and relevant information about how critical discourse analysis informed the analytical process. Chapters four and five contain analyses of the parents and students (respectively) written and spoken statements, and Chapter six synthesizes some of the themes and analysis, with concluding thoughts and implications for future research.

Chapter 1: Setting the Context

Community Sites for the Research

The ethnoburb of Brampton

The students and families who participated in this research lived in Brampton, ON.

Brampton is a large suburban municipality of Toronto, bound by the City of Mississauga to the south, which is the site of the region's large international airport, and by mostly rural lands and communities to the north, east, and west. Today, Brampton is the fourth largest city in Ontario, but it began as a small village in the 1850s and was incorporated as a city in 1974 with a population of 88,820 (City of Brampton, n.d.). The students and parents who participated in this research were all racialized, first- and second-generation Canadians who chose to live in Brampton, ON, so it is important to know some of the key features of the community and what the local area around the school was like. This section provides relevant information about suburbs, ethnoburbs, and Brampton as important contexts to consider in this dissertation.

The origin of suburbs in Canada can be traced back to the 1930s, but they grew in size and number during the post-war period when an expansion of municipal and federal housing policies encouraged the development of 'bedroom communities.' Infrastructure projects meant that highways, schools, and businesses accompanied middle-class families' move to suburban areas, though these communities were seen as largely devoid of culture; cities remained the centres for art, music, and other forms of cultural practice (Hulchanski, 2010). In many places, zoning laws meant that areas of housing and commercial business were segregated, and public transit limited or inaccessible. As a result, vehicles were ubiquitous and necessary, while walking to work or school was not a part of everyday life. To a large part, this remains true. Data from

the Peel District School Board for the school year of 2012 showed 1349 students at the school, of which only 183 rode the school bus⁵.

Suburbs have seen numerous changes in recent decades. Today, many are municipalities stand-alone political entities, meaning that people do not live in these urban-adjacent communities so they can commute into the city, but instead, people settle in the suburbs with a plan to spend their work, school, social, and community lives there. For many decades in Canada, suburban life was the iconic image of the White middle-class experience (Harris, 2004; Perrott, 2007; Reay et al., 2011). Perrott (2007) points out that in the marketing campaigns of the 1990s and 2000s for Markham, ON, a municipality near Toronto that is largely Asian/Chinese, advertisements still featured a majority of White models, and the images in ads were in keeping with traditional notions of suburban life (spacious, safe, family-oriented, friendly) (Perrott, 2007). Kataure and Walton-Roberts (2013) show that among second-generation South Asian Canadians, suburban communities remain desirable places to live. One of the many reasons is related to the historical development of these communities. In contrast to ‘ghettos,’ they were formed voluntarily because they featured a high degree of home ownership (often at a lower cost than in urban centres), community involvement, business ownership, and political representation (Kataure & Walton-Roberts, 2013; Wang & Zhong, 2013). This dynamic has led to community shifts, for example, in White residence patterns in Brampton, where ‘White flight’⁶ in the early

⁵ At Streetsview High school, I observed the driveway and street in front of the school to be very busy during before and after-school hours, indicating that many students were picked up and dropped off from school. It was not common to hear of students taking public transit to get to school. We did not capture data on exactly how students got to and from school.

⁶ ‘White flight’ is a term that originally referred to the movement of White people from city centres to suburbs in U.S. cities in the post-war period because of White racism and fears about racialized people who were arriving in greater numbers. It has since been applied more broadly to refer to a more complex set of processes of White demographic changes in geographic regions (Rogers et al., 2013).

2000s and 2010s resulted in community tension that led to local media stories about how “massive suburban-style growth couples with a huge influx of new Canadians, mostly South Asian, settling in a community that for decades was mostly white” (Grewal, 2013). Reay et al. (2011) point out that race matters in the suburbs, as the demographic shifts that have taken place often reflect racialized patterns. Peake and Ray (2001) and Hulchanski (2010) also describe the ways in which space—from public space to city neighbourhoods—is deeply racially marked, with Whiteness as the norm and non-White people, communities, and signifiers ghettoized or pushed to the literal margins (e.g., the ethnoburbs of Toronto). Butler and Hamnett (2010), in their book on class, ethnicity, and aspiration, found that there were aspirational and value differences between urban-seeking and urban-fleeing White people. I suggest that in this study, the racialized first-and-second-generation parents and children were suburban-seeking; several families talked about having moved from more urban neighbourhoods in, or closer to, Toronto, to Brampton, in order to access safer neighbourhoods, better schools, and more personal space.

Brampton’s residential infrastructure is dominated by what look like single family homes,⁷ and the uniform design of large neighbourhoods in the community give it the quintessential ‘look’ of a 21st-century suburb. Brick homes with driveways, garages, and front lawns dominate. The streets are mostly wide, with young trees and sidewalks. There are few White families in Brampton; no White students were among the cohort I worked with in the Grade 12 class at Streetsview High. Today, in more than 50% of the census tracts for Brampton, more than 50% of residents are visible minorities—the highest in the GTA in 2006 (Wang &

⁷ Brampton is made up of mixed-density homes, including many townhouse and condo-style developments, as well as multi-family homes. This contrasts with the stereotypical idea of a suburb, which calls up images of one-or-two-storey single-family homes, with front-facing garages, front lawns, situated on large lots (Madi & O’Byrne, 2018; Keil, 2020).

Zhong, 2013). South Asians, and specifically Punjabi speakers, are the most prominent group of people who identify as ‘visible minorities’ in the Census of Population in Brampton, and the South Asian community has relatively high levels of political participation and representation at all three levels of governance (Wang & Zhong, 2013, p. 24).

This majority-minority community is what Li (2009) calls an ethnoburb: a distinct community formation characterized not only by a majority ethnic population but also by a concentration of ethnic businesses and institutions in the community. The suburbs have a long history of being associated with middle-class life, which, until recently, implied Whiteness in both ethnicity and culture. In the United States, the proliferation of White suburbs in the post-war period was not accidental; the historical record and scholarship document how Black and other non-Whites were kept out of suburban communities through racist and segregationist practices (Harris, 1993; Rothstein, 2007). In Canada, ethnic enclaves have been features of major cities since the early 20th century, and an important feature of these has always been the relative position of ethnic communities to the dominant group.⁸ As Zucchi (2007) writes, “The ethnic group’s lack of power in the political process, and perhaps more important still, the perception that a group was somehow ‘less’ and therefore lacking in power, helped define who would really qualify as outsiders and therefore inhabitants of the ethnic neighbourhood.” As Wang and Zhong (2013) discuss, ethnoburbs have social, demographic, and economic features in common, and are

⁸ In most English-language Canadian social science literature, the dominant group in Canada refers to those with White, European ancestry, who are English-speaking (Myers & Zaman, 2009). In sociological literature, the dominant group in a society has more economic and political power than subordinate groups. This power is used to legitimize ideas and viewpoints that, taken together, form the leading set of values in a society, and which reflect the dominant groups’ values, norms, and culture (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Taken together, these ideas and cultural practices make up the dominant value system, “composed of the ideas that serve the interests of the ruling class, and through the effort of various agencies such as the media...are also accepted as legitimate by large numbers of the subordinate groups in society” (Lawson et al., 2009).

broadly defined as “suburban clusters of ethnic residential areas and businesses in large metropolitan regions” (p. 4).

I assert that the common features of ethnoburb communities in Li (2009) and Wang and Zhong’s (2013) work are applicable to the suburban community of Brampton, most notably the particular immigration and settlement patterns that gave rise to the majority population of first- and second-generation racial minorities and the many ethno-specific cultural, religious, and social organizations, as well as businesses that support the continuation of language, culture, and strong community ties for community members. Other writing and scholarship about Brampton also refer to it as an ethnoburb (see Ahmed-Ullah, 2016; Balasubramaniam, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2017). Therefore, for the purpose of contextualizing my research and in order to enter into scholarly discussions on shared topics of interest, I use ‘ethnoburb’ as a conceptual tool through which to understand the community of Brampton. I find the term useful because, as Reay et al. (2011) note, it is important to name and critique “the unacknowledged normality of both whiteness and middle-classness” (p. 1). The concept of ethnoburb places ethnicity and race front and centre in the formulation of the community, which is consistent with how I view race and ethnicity from a critical race theory position.

The municipality of Brampton has undergone important shifts in demographics and rapid growth in recent decades. Data from the City of Brampton highlights some of the changes and provide demographic information for Brampton at the time of the study. As mentioned above, Brampton has gone from being mostly White to being mostly non-White (City of Brampton, 2019c), and it is the first community many newly arrived Canadians live in (City of Brampton, 2019c). Brampton is the fourth largest city in Ontario and ninth largest in Canada as of 2016 (City of Brampton, 2019b). While the average rate of population growth in Canada is around 5%,

Brampton's population increased by 13.3% from 2011 to 2016. Not only is the city growing faster than others but its population's median age of 35 is younger than the median age in most Canadian cities. Families in Brampton are larger, too, with on average 3.5 people per household, compared to 2.9 in the rest of Canada. Most notable for this research, the percentage of visible minorities in Brampton is steadily increasing, with 73.3% of Brampton residents identifying as visible minorities. This is a big increase, up 25% from 2011. The most common birthplaces for residents of Brampton are India, followed by Jamaica, Pakistan, the Philippines, Guyana, Sri Lanka, the U.K., Portugal, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vietnam (City of Brampton, 2019c). This list reflects the backgrounds of the students I met at Streetsview High, most of whom were South Asian, Black, and East Asian. I also met students whose families came from countries in both East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia) and West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria).⁹ As census data from 2011 and 2016 suggest, the past decade has been one of expansion and change for Brampton. This was clear on the ground, insofar as the school site for this research was very new at the time, having only graduated one class of Grade 12 students. Many of the residential streets around the school in 2010–2012 were yet unnamed or were still being constructed.

The concept of the suburb/ethnoburb will be important to analysis of data in this dissertation. It provides important context for discussions around 'community' and lived experiences in Brampton, which cannot be adequately understood without first making sense of some of the particularities of ethnoburbs, of suburbs, and of Brampton specifically.

⁹ A chart of the parents and students is provided in Chapter 3, p.69-70.

Canadian Research on Schooling and Education

Educational Mobility

The previous section discussed Brampton as an ethnoburb, a site for achieving upward social mobility, which resonates with common societal aspirations. In this Chapter, I provide a discussion of the interplay between education, immigrant experiences, and broader social narratives, within the framework of critical race theory. The families involved in this research consistently positioned education as the surest path to upward social mobility. They are not alone in this belief. Many people understand the purpose of formal schooling and education as enhancing the chance to land a well-paying job and achieve financial stability. Conversely, a lack of formal schooling and education, or failure to achieve while at school, is linked to lower social class status and lower earnings: “According to the OECD (2012), Canadians with less than upper secondary education have earnings that are 22% lower than those of high school graduates (Pathways to Education, 2020).” For working-class families in Canada, formal schooling and education are often seen as an asset that can be leveraged to achieve upward intergenerational mobility. A fundamental question in the field of sociology of education is whether formal schooling reproduces social inequities or helps achieve social equity. My research offers an account of parents’ and students’ perceptions and stated ideas about their pursuit of education and how it fits into larger goals of economic security and social mobility. In this section, I consider how scholars have thought about these ideas, and what a critical race theory approach to education might tell us about immigrant success, racialization, and intergenerational success in non-White immigrant families.

The field of sociology of education is frequently focused on questions of educational inequity. Guppy and Lyon (2019) provided a review of sociological research in Canadian

education from 1980–2017. They found five main streams or trends in such research: mobility/meritocracy; identity and values; discrimination and racism; Indigenous education; and institutional process (Guppy & Lyon, 2019, p. 254). My research in this dissertation is concerned with the first two categories: mobility and meritocracy, and identity and values.

Chow and Guppy (2021) studied Canadian intergenerational educational mobility through the concept of exchange mobility, an analytical idea that refers to the distance or proximity between one's socioeconomic origin and one's socioeconomic location in adult life. As they write, "Greater fairness or social progress occurs when, over time, destinations become less contingent on origins" (Chow & Guppy, 2021, p. 372). Studies using the concept of exchange mobility show the children of immigrants do tend to achieve post-secondary degrees at rates that are higher than other groups in Canada (Turcotte, 2019), and research by Taylor and Krahn (2013) showed first-generation Canadians strongly preferred their children to enrol in university programs that led to professional careers. However, Chow and Guppy (2021) note that the apparent growth in the numbers of young Canadians who access post-secondary education may be due more to the structural expansion of the post-secondary education system in Canada than to an increase in intergenerational exchange mobility. In other words, access to education might not necessarily equate to greater social equity. Other dynamics may be at play.

Furthermore, the concept of exchange mobility relies on a 'starting point' for upward mobility. In their research on how intergenerational educational mobility is measured in the US, Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) comment on the importance of 'starting points.' They note that the 'starting point' used for measurements of upward mobility in most studies is parents' socioeconomic status in the US, which they operationalize as "household incomes, parental occupational attainments and parental years of schooling" (p. 219). They argue what is missed in

this conceptualization is attention to parents' educational attainment, considering the historic, social, geographic, or other contexts that may nuance understandings of socioeconomic status. They call this contextual understanding 'parental contextual attainment' and posit that "educational decisions are informed by different considerations in developing countries (from where many immigrants migrate) than in the United States" (p. 217). "For example," they write, "completing secondary school within a context in which most individuals complete only primary schooling is quite different from completing secondary school in another context, such as the United States, where most people go on to college" (p. 232). This more nuanced approach to understanding parental educational attainment, as relative to the parents' context of origin, informs their theorizing and methodology.

Accordingly, Feliciano and Lanuza's (2017) conception of parental contextual attainment "locates each parent in the educational distribution of his or her origin country, based on age and gender" (p. 217). When this approach is used, the supposed over-achievement of first- and second-generation students as compared to their native-born peers, often disappears. Instead, it is revealed that "immigrant children are not experiencing the remarkable intergenerational mobility that scholars suggest" (p. 217) and that the most common intergenerational pattern may be class reproduction. Youth in Canada reproduce the same educational attainment, relative to national context, as their parents.

This is relevant to my research insofar as the parents in this study have various points of departure from which they imagine upward mobility. The point of departure that they consider meaningful for upward mobility may be situated in their country of origin and not in Canada. It is important to be sensitive to the range of contexts and location, especially in country of origin,

for parents. I do not to assume that these families share socioeconomic or other demographic markers that explain their shared focus on post-secondary attainment.

Race Inequities in Education

In Canada, about 70% of high school graduates go on to post-secondary schooling (Guppy & Lyon, 2019), which includes attendance in the college system and the largely public university system. Today, around 30% of Canadian adults aged 25–64 hold a university degree (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, 2017). Data from the past two decades in Canada show women are increasingly pursuing post-secondary education; the percentage of women aged 25–34 who achieved bachelor's degrees grew from 32.8% in 2006 to 40.7% in 2016. Women accounted for over half of those (50.6%) who earned a doctoral degree in Canada in 2016. Young men show a different pattern in post-secondary pursuits and are increasingly accessing training in skilled trades, with the number of men holding an apprenticeship certificate rising from 4.9% in 2006 to 7.8% in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Canada has a larger college sector than most other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and as a result, has one of the highest proportions of college achievement in OECD countries. To note, 22.4% of the Canadian population had a college diploma in 2016, compared to, on average, 8% in other OECD countries (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Immigrants who arrived in Canada as children participate in post-secondary education at a higher rate than the overall Canadian population, and participation is highest among those who arrive youngest. In 2019, post-secondary participation rates were 70.3% for immigrants who arrived as children and 58.9% for Canadians in general (tracked at age 20). This higher-than-average participation rate is correlated with parents' level of post-secondary education; Canada has strict points-based immigration that links admittance with levels of education, skills

(including language proficiency), and other socioeconomic factors (Childs et al., 2017; Turcotte, 2019). According to Latif (2018), several studies have shown that parents' level of educational attainment is correlated with the levels of education their children are likely to achieve.

However, research also shows gender differences. While fathers who have low educational attainment levels are likely to have sons who attain similarly low levels of education, the trend does not persist as significantly for daughters; in other words, low educational attainment by fathers is not predictive of low attainment in their opposite-sex children (Latif, 2018). Turcotte's (2019) analysis of Statistics Canada data showed that the children of immigrants (or second-generation Canadians) also outperform third-generation Canadians in terms of post-secondary completion. In this study, Turcotte (2019) found that 43% of second-generation Canadians (who were 13 to 16 in 2006) had graduated from a post-secondary program in 2016, compared to 29% of Canadians third generation or higher.

Analyzing 2016 census data, Hou and Chen (2019) found divergent outcomes in terms of both post-secondary educational achievement and how this translates into labour-market success for various groups of second-generation Canadians. While nearly all research in this area points to second-generation Canadians outperforming third-plus generation Whites¹⁰, some ethnoracial groups see more success than others. Specifically, Hou and Chen (2019) found that Chinese, South Asian, Korean, and Japanese people experience both high educational attainment and labour-market outcomes that are comparable to other groups. A second group, consisting of West Asians, Arabs, and some Southeast Asians, experience "good educational mobility but low employment and below-average earnings" (p. 6), while second-generation Blacks and Latin Americans were distinct because of a gendered pattern in the data showing men lagging behind

¹⁰ While many immigrants to Canada are racialized as White, participants in this study were all non-White.

women in educational mobility. Data points to “moderate educational mobility and low educational mobility among men” (p. 6) and “low earnings for both men and women” (p. 6).

Another group of interest in the study, second-generation Filipinos in Canada, also showed a sex-linked pattern, with men falling behind women in both earnings and educational mobility. Childs et al. (2015) found similar racialized patterns in data on the post-secondary attainment of first- and second-generation Canadians. They noted that certain groups, namely Chinese, East Asian, and African communities, attained post-secondary education at a higher rate than multigenerational Canadians, but that Latin American and Caribbean students lagged behind. Boyd and Tian (2016) found that among the second-generation children of East Asian immigrants who immigrated to Canada as children (the 1.5 generation), the groups with the highest percentage of people achieving a university degree or higher are Chinese and Korean.

Clearly there is no single immigrant story, nor single trajectory. It is important to pay attention to the outliers, differences, and inconsistencies, as well as to the broad trends, which include the fact that, overall, most Canadians attend some form of post-secondary education and that cohorts of first- and second-generation racialized Canadians consistently outperform third-generation White Canadians. Yet, in striking contrast to what might be expected in a meritocratic, multicultural society – a society in which cultural minorities are specifically valued - research instead shows that there are specific outcomes and varying post-secondary educational success for different ethnoracial groups.

For example, recent data on Canadian graduates at the bachelor’s level shows that 30% of all Canadian bachelor’s degree recipients in 2014 to 2017 were members of a visible minority. Of these, two thirds were Chinese, South Asian or Black. There were sex-linked disparities in the data also: among most Asian groups, the graduation rate for men and women is nearly 50/50; but

for Black graduates, the sexual disparity is such that 64% are women (Brunet, S., & Galarneau, D., 2022). The number of Black men completing a post-secondary education has been in decline since 2011 (Do, 2020). Both Do (2020) and Turcotte (2020) offer potential influencing factors, such as lower socioeconomic status, discrimination in the job market, and a potential lack of supportive professionals such as teachers in the lives of young Black men. Do's research (2020) also showed that while Black men are as likely to report that they would like to attain a university degree (94%, on par with other groups), they are less hopeful than other groups that they will achieve their goal (60%). Other factors that have been shown to play a role in students' educational attainment include age at the time of study: research shows that Asian students begin and complete their bachelor's degrees at a younger age than most Black students, who are, on average, older (29 years of age versus 24 years of age) when they graduate and more likely to report having a dependent child within two years of completing their degree (Brunet, S., & Galarneau, D., 2022). Immigrant status has also proven to be a significant factor in post-secondary attainment: "More than half (54%) of visible minority Canadian graduates were first-generation immigrants (born abroad); 43% were second-generation (born in Canada and with at least one parent born abroad) and less than 3% were third-generation (born in Canada with parents also born in Canada) (Brunet, S., & Galarneau, D., 2022. p. 2)." Immigrant status emerges as a key factor that has implications extending across generational lines. Remarkably, a mere 3% of visible minority Canadian graduates belong to the third-generation category. This small proportion underscores the relatively recent and rapid changes to Canada's population through non-White immigration. Taken together, these statistics illuminate the critical role of immigrant generational status in shaping post-secondary attainment. Educational aspirations and

achievements are intertwined with the experience of migration and the pursuit of upwards social mobility.

While broad statistics tell us that first- and second-generation Canadians tend to embark on post-secondary education, and research and data on post-secondary attainment in Canada point to the students in this study completing university, there are important nuances to consider such as their understandings of ‘doing well’ (success), how they plan to act on their perceived options, and what will motivate them to keep up the hard work it takes to successfully complete university and transition to adulthood as an upwardly mobile young person. There is a gap between similar desires and differential outcomes and experiences, revealing how race and immigration status play out differently in educational attainment across immigrant communities. It is against this backdrop of the promise of meritocracy and the reality of enduring differences in educational attainment across racialized, immigrant communities, that I undertake my study.

My aim is to unpack the messages and meanings that these first- and second-generation mostly South Asian, that is, racialized immigrant students expressed about their educational futures and expected outcomes, shedding light on how they navigate the promise of meritocracy in a social reality of enduring racial differences in educational attainment. To do so, I draw on critical race theory, explained in Chapter two, which specifically takes up the voices of racial minorities who are also first- or second-generation Canadians, to shed new light on how inequities are reproduced within a racialized, immigrant community.

Parental Sacrifice and the Immigrant Bargain

The immigrant bargain (Legewie, 2016) is a broad narrative concept that encompasses the challenges and risks people encounter when they leave their home country in pursuit of a better life elsewhere. The ‘bargain’ is that immigrants are trading some degree of familiar

comforts, social ties and belonging, and established lives in their home countries for the potential access to greater opportunities and a higher quality of life in a new place. This does not always work out positively, but the hope is that future gains will outweigh the immediate hardships. The immigrant bargain applies to many immigrants, not only to those who are parents.

Parental sacrifice is part of the immigrant bargain, more narrowly focused on the individual sacrifices that parents, whether immigrants or not, make for the well-being and advancement of their children. While the immigrant bargain encompasses the overarching challenges of the immigration experience, parental sacrifice zeroes in on the daily struggles that parents endure, such as working multiple jobs, forgoing personal luxuries, or enduring the challenges of living in an unfamiliar culture, for the sake of their children. Both concepts are important to my analyses in chapters 4 and 5.

When parents arrive in a new country with optimism about the opportunities available to their children, and children grow up aware of the sacrifices and struggles of their parents, the sense of obligation that children feel can help motivate them to pursue and excel in academics (Nesteruk, 2022). As Dreby and Stutz (2012) write:

The ‘immigrant bargain’ describes how Asian American parents influence the expectations of youth: immigrant parents, who are particularly optimistic, expect their children to succeed. In turn, youth feel pressure to fulfill their familial obligations (p.71).

Narratives of immigration and sacrifice, and the ways they play out in families, have implications for people from many ethnocultural groups: Ceballo et al. (2014) showed that among low-income Latino families, parents’ stories about their struggles with poverty and migration contributed to the students’ desire to ‘give back’ to their parents through academic success. Schooling is one of the most important ways that children can begin to achieve success,

especially since public schooling in Canada is provincially funded and intended to be accessible to all children. Research on first-generation parents and children supports the importance and prevalence of narratives of sacrifice and opportunity in how families discuss education (Hua-Yu & Liu, 2017; Legewie, 2016; Louie, 2004; Nesteruk, 2022; Rocha et al., 2022; Taylor & Krahn, 2013; Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). Studies attest that many first- and second-generation students are told that their families moved to another country at least partially so that their children could access better educational opportunities (Costigan et al., 2016; Kang & Larson, 2004; Rocha et al., 2022). Soong et al. (2022) note that regardless of background, the racialized refugee parents and youth participants in their study were “explicit in reminding their children about the importance of education, with an expectation that their children would complete high school and go to university” (p. 7). They also highlighted the importance of paying attention to parents’ educational aspirations for their children in the context of the parents’ own experiences with work and education in both former and present countries of residence. Educational attainment is a recurrent, central theme when discussing parental aspirations and motivations for immigrating. In their 2016 paper, Costigan et al. point out that Canada’s immigration policies and the motivations of immigrants are most often discussed in economic terms. Yet in their study of 182 Chinese-Canadian families, the authors found that the second-most common answer provided by respondents when asked about their motivations to migrate to Canada were related to better access to educational opportunities for their children (Costigan et al, 2016). Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) suggest that to understand the idea of parental sacrifice more attention should be paid to habitus, which they define as Bourdieu’s notion of “where one fits in the social world and the set of dispositions, skills, and habits that emerge from that conception” (p. 215). Specifically, they place the narrative of parental sacrifice

as an aspect of habitus; a family narrative that informs children about “where they come from, both literally and figuratively” (p. 215).

Some studies that looked at parental sacrifice and immigrant bargain narratives’ impacts on youth also addressed the model minority stereotype, which adds complexity to how Asian youth understand the familial expectation to succeed. The stereotype of high-achieving Asian students is a racialized discourse that can add stress for some youth (Dreby and Stutz, 2012). Louie (2004) documented how Chinese parents told their children that if discrimination and racism would impact their lives, educational achievement could help buffer the impacts of negative stereotypes, and that education was the main route for attaining social mobility. Despite the racialized stereotypes like the model minority narrative or very different, negative stereotypes faced by Black students who are expected not to succeed in educational settings (James 2012), there is evidence that a strong positive ethnic identity (consisting of feelings of pride, a sense of belonging, and knowledge about one’s ethnic group) is a predictor of more positive orientations towards schooling and education (Costigan, Hua and Su, 2010). This strengths-based perspective is consistent with the approach I take. If I recognize the important ways that racism impacts the racialized immigrant parents and youth that my study centers, I draw on Yosso’s concepts of cultural wealth, which are detailed in the next chapter, to see beyond the deficit model that often frames being racialized within an individualized “deficit” narrative. Instead, my narrative focuses on the community supports that see so many first- and second-generation racialized immigrants aiming and achieving the goals they and their parents set out for them, despite the racism that they face. As Rocha (2021) writes:

For many children of immigrants, obtaining a college education means much more than living a better lifestyle. It means acknowledging the hardships and sacrifices their parents lived and continue to live to ensure better life outcomes for their children (p.199).

As such, my research captured short conversations about educational goals between first- and second-generation parents¹¹ and their children in a specific community, the ethnoburb of Brampton, and in my analysis, I will consider how narratives around sacrifice – sacrifices that are partly exacted as a consequence of systemic racisms - may be turned into community and familial resources that motivate and inform these family's educational aspirations.

Summary

This first chapter set the context for the forthcoming discussion of the educational aspirations and experiences of a small cohort of first- and second-generation Canadian families in Brampton, Ontario. I also provided relevant information about educational mobility among first- and second-generation racialized Canadians. The municipality of Brampton is considered an 'ethnoburb' with a majority non-White, largely South Asian diasporic population, and these specificities are important to understanding the lived experiences of the youth and parent participants in this research. Chapter 1 also briefly reviewed relevant literature and concepts on the topic of educational mobility, such as information about racial disparities in education, and the concepts of the "immigrant bargain" and "parental sacrifice", narratives that inform children about their familial obligations and the sacrifices made by their parents for their future wellbeing. These narratives are powerful motivators for academic success among immigrant children and these concepts will reappear in the analyses of student and parent data, in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. For the research participants, the context of life in an ethnoburb, the interplay of

¹¹ 16 of the 17 parents who participated in the parent/child interviews were foreign-born. One was Canadian born.

familial narratives, the parents' involvement in schooling and education, and the dynamics of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds, all play a role in shaping educational aspirations, beliefs and expectations.

In the next chapter, key theoretical concepts and ideas are introduced. Critical race theory is a theoretical tool for interrupting the assumptions made in a neoliberal society about individual success, equal opportunity, and the dominant beliefs promoted in a so-called colourblind and multicultural Canadian society. A discussion of these theoretical ideas follows in Chapter two.

Chapter 2 Theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Community Cultural Wealth

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced Brampton, a Canadian ethnoburb, as the site of the research. The school, Streetsview, has mostly racialized second-generation immigrant students, and this dissertation aims to shed light on the hopes of those students for their educational futures, including how they negotiate their future pathways with their racialized first-generation immigrant parents. I am drawing on the partly distinct literatures about immigration and racialization to look at the intersection of immigration and racialization, and how social relations play out among the racialized first- and second-generation youth who are at the heart of this study. To understand how these students and their parents frame their educational hopes for post-secondary studies, I begin with critical race theory (CRT) and the related concept of community cultural wealth, which CRT scholar Tara J. Yosso introduced in a 2005 paper. These theoretical foundations for the work are important because they help to disrupt the meritocratic assumptions that are entrenched in a neoliberal society such as Canada. Neoliberalism, as it is understood here, is the “dominant governing rationality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Henry et al., 2017, p. 12)”: a set of beliefs and ideas about individual merit in an ‘equal opportunity’ multicultural society. The theoretical context I lay out in this chapter helps to challenge the assumptions that prevailing narratives about meritocracy, neoliberalism and multiculturalism make about, for example, equal opportunity, individualism, and racial equity. CRT supports the importance of taking up racialized immigrant youth’s voices as I do in this research, thereby offering important insights into the lived experiences of racialized people and how their aspirations are formed in educational contexts. I begin with an overview of CRT as a

tool for analysis in the sociology of education, a review of the tenets of critical race theory, and then discuss the relevance of specific CRT-informed ideas to this research.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the Sociology of Education:

CRT is a tool for analysis that examines how structural racism in schooling and education impacts both everyday life and larger social institutions and social practices. As noted by James (2010):

Critical Race Theory asserts that people of colour have distinctive experiences that can be used to reveal important truths...By exposing the myths of meritocracy and race-neutrality, Critical Race Theory demonstrates how individual and institutional practices continue to justify the exclusion of racial minorities (p.25).

In so observing, critical race scholars note that lived experiences are an important source of knowledge, and James' work more broadly examines how the underpinnings of racial ideologies and racialized institutional practices play out in Canadian educational settings for Black and other racialized students.

Individualized understandings of racism, which Bonilla-Silva (2015), a CRT scholar, refers to as the 'racism-as-discrimination' view of racism, focuses on the psychology of racism, on personal beliefs, and on individual action as the 'causes' for racism (Caouette & Taylor, 2007; Frankenberg 1993a, 1993b, 1997; McDermott & Samson, 2005). CRT scholars acknowledge that individual acts of discrimination and racism are part of the daily lived realities for many people of colour, yet the solutions to racism in society should not be primarily focused on individuals, but on larger systems and institutional practices. A CRT-informed analysis, like the one presented in this dissertation, is interested in systemic and institutional change rather than on changing individual attitudes.

The specific site of this research, and the topical focus, is on educational success and on how racialized students and their parents, many of whom are immigrants to Canada, work to reach their goals in educational systems that have been shown to produce inequitable results for racialized, immigrant families like the racialized parents and youth in this study (as was laid out in Chapter 1). CRT analyses are informed by the realities of racialized people, not by the needs or perceptions of the dominant group, in order to reveal truths about race and racism that are obscured in colour-blind systemic racism. It is this CRT perspective that informs my own decision to investigate the persistent myths of meritocracy and the persistent realities of racially inequitable educational outcomes in multicultural Canada.

CRT's Origins and Three Main Tenets

Critical race theory originated in American legal scholarship in a post-civil rights era, beginning in the 1970s. Critical race scholars (as they came to be known) such as Derrick Bell (2005, 2020), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 2019), and Charles Lawrence (1987, 1990) showed that racial inequities were inherent to all parts of American society, and were embedded in the law, despite the gains made toward racial equity in the civil rights era. This is the first tenet of CRT: that racism is endemic to society, embedded in systems, institutions, and structures, and in personal relations.

A second tenet of CRT is that race is a social construction. CRT sees racial identity as deeply meaningful and significant to social life – a “master category”, as Omi and Winant (1995, p.106) call it, but not so because it is biologically meaningful. Race has no biological or genetic basis in science, yet it is a very salient aspect of social life because of the deeply ingrained ideas that societies and cultures cultivate and maintain about race; these ideas are normalized and woven into all aspects of life, institutions, and structures. The process of attributing a racial

category to a person and then giving meaning to racial difference is called racialization, thus ‘racialized’ is a term that helps connote with more nuance the idea that ‘race’ exists, but only insofar as it is a collection of shared and socially understood set of ideas about race.

A third tenet of CRT, especially relevant to the data set that informs this research, is that the first-person stories of people of colour are valuable sources of knowledge for understanding how racism operates. Sleeter (2016) writes: “As dominant ideologies and knowledge systems based on White worldviews deny or mask racism, CRT theorists assume that those who understand racism best are not its perpetrators but rather those who are routinely victimized by it” (p.8). CRT scholarship pays close attention to ‘voice’ and ‘narrative,’ an academic response of the subfield to the ways that marginalized peoples have historically, and especially in curriculum, had their stories controlled and presented by White people. The resulting half-truths, incomplete stories, and stereotypes have long reflected the biases of White people. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that “The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (p. 58).

A fourth tenet of CRT, the one most relevant to the analysis of the data in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this dissertation, is that meritocracy, and its claims about neutrality and colourblindness, are myths. As recently as 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau suggested that meritocracy was central to the “Canadian Dream”:

when we were growing up it seemed like the sky was the limit. If you worked hard, got a good education, and applied yourself, you could get a good job. Everyone just expected they’d do better than their parents.... That sense of hope and optimism. That sense that a good job and a great future are theirs for the taking. That’s the dream—that very

Canadian dream—.... It's time. It's time to give every Canadian a real and fair chance to succeed. (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015)

This speaks to PM Trudeau's belief, since he was then on the campaign trail, that meritocracy is still a compelling idea to many Canadians, about "giving every Canadian a real and fair chance to succeed." Note that in this speech excerpt, Trudeau suggests that meritocracy has waned in Canada, and he calls for a return to meritocratic ideals. This reinforces the idea that meritocracy was indeed a feature of Canadian life in the past and worth striving for once again.

Jonathan Mijs (2016) helps to unpack the assumptions embedded in persistent meritocratic ideas about fairness and explains the link between meritocratic ideas and the legitimization of social inequality. He writes, to closely paraphrase below, that meritocratic ideologies have three parts:

- One, careers are determined by talent, as opposed to by nepotism, bribery, or other unfair mechanisms.
- Two, educational opportunities are matched to ability, as determined by testing and other standardized selection mechanisms. This is rooted in the idea that 'talent should not go to waste' and emerged as an idea within mass education systems in the mid-20th century in Western countries.
- Three, different achievement should lead to different rewards. In practice, this means the most important positions in society are filled by the most qualified people—in contrast to leadership by ascription, as in a monarchical system.

(Mijs, 2016)

The appeal of meritocracy in Western societies, which are increasingly economically unequal, is that it provides a legitimizing narrative, consistent with the American Dream—or the "Canadian

Dream” -- that justifies the status quo. It offers a narrative of Canada as a just society, providing built-in motivation for ‘high achievers’ based on how rewards are allocated: in this story, the highest achievers will be granted the highest rewards. This narrative can serve to promote and encourage effort and hard work, for if rewards are the result of high achievement through effort, one is incentivized to work hard.

As Mijs and Savage (2020) write, despite its appeal to a just society, “meritocracy is...a deeply elitist project.” Meritocratic ideas serve to justify existing social inequality by suggesting that the current allocation of resources reflects rewards for individual hard work and effort. This narrative makes it difficult to critique inequities in a system that is not set up so that everyone can ‘succeed.’ Its rise has coincided with the intensification of economic inequity over the past several decades, but also, interestingly, with the expansion of equal opportunity agendas. As Mijs and Savage note, meritocracy “became an iconic mantra with the rise of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination agendas, in which recruitment purely on the virtue of ‘merit’ became de rigueur (2020, p.397).” Moreover, they note that meritocratic beliefs may serve to justify significant disparities, shifting focus away from the pursuit of justice in inequitable societies.

Critiques of meritocracy have also come from scholars who suggest that class, race, and gender inequities prevent supposedly meritocratic societies, like Canada from working as they should. These scholars point to the reproduction of class, race, and gender inequalities over generations, on questions ranging from equitable access to housing (Springer, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2023b) to employment (Block and Galabuzi, 2011) to political engagement (Galabuzi, 2008) as evidence that meritocracy is not functioning as it claims to. Taken together, the forms of persistent and growing inequity in Canadian society reveal a process of social exclusion (Galabuzi, 2008) in which some groups of people are unable to, as Galabuzi writes:

participate fully in Canadian life due to structural inequalities in access to social, economic, political, and cultural resources arising out of the often intersecting experiences of oppression relating to race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and immigrant status (Galabuzi, 2008, p.81)

In Canada, the supposedly neutral functioning of meritocratic policies disguises discriminatory institutional policies and practices and inequitable access to power for some groups. Institutional norms assume meritocracy, and then appear to reward high achievement, when in fact class, race, and gender inequities are reproduced. Further, As Mijs (2021) points out, the idea of meritocracy is broadly supportive of socially unequal societies. For Mijs (2021) “This is not just a coincidental association: meritocratic beliefs are not opposed to inequality—only to discrimination, which prevents people with the right ‘merits’ from reaping rewards” (p. 397). In this construction, meritocracy is maintained as the ideal, and no substantial consideration is given to its inherent limitation or to how it upholds and justifies the status quo of social inequity rather than opening up discussion of more socially equal societies.

In my study, the idea of meritocracy is important, because even if merit was not mentioned explicitly, parents and students drew consistently upon ideas that suggest that hard work at high school would be rewarded by entry into a good post-secondary institution and then be further rewarded by a high-paying and high-status job. In Canada, meritocratic narratives suggest an equal playing field in which racialized or cultural “minorities” are not disadvantaged. In this story, racialized minorities in Canada, too, can aspire to be meritocratically rewarded, because in a multicultural Canadian society, cultural and implicitly racial “difference” are supposedly accepted and valorized.

CRT challenges meritocratic claims by showing how these are formed by, and reflect the interests of, the dominant White settler group (Sleeter, 2016), whose values are often presented as if they are universal ideals. Critical race scholars have pointed out that this pretense of racial neutrality, or colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, 2015; Crenshaw, 2019; James, 2011; Lewis, 2004), purports that racial differences are insignificant in a society that offers ‘equal opportunities.’ This default position that claims not to see race, or that race does not matter, thus refuses to consider race-based policies or programs aimed at achieving equity. As Crenshaw points out, “...the ideal of colorblindness as the default position for social justice actually functions as a color-conscious tool crafted to protect white preferences and privileges.” (Crenshaw, 2019, p.3-4). CRT has been instrumental in challenging these forms of so-called colour-blind racial thinking, in part by noting “that colorblindness – the idea that racial differences are unimportant – is unattainable in a society in which people have historically been treated differently because of race” (James, 2010, p. 25). CRT articulates how racial thinking is inextricably woven into the structures of our personal lives and into the laws, norms, policies, and practices of our institutions.

Meritocratic narratives would predict that only individual-level differences should persist in the data on who accesses post-secondary education, either because a colourblind society is indifferent to an individual’s (for example) race, and only rewards each person based on merit, or because a diverse society, like Canada, actively values “minority” cultures and does not discriminate against them, thus enhancing meritocratic patterns. Contrary to this narrative, Chapter 1 discussed data showing significant differences between immigrant and Canada-born communities and differences in educational and occupational attainment among racialized communities, and between racialized and White individuals in Canada. Despite the

pervasiveness of the meritocratic discourse and its ongoing centering as an ideal – part of Trudeau’s “Canadian Dream” - as my later chapter will show, the realities of the Canadian education system tell a very different story.

CRT Challenges the Assumptions of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, as I see it, is one expression of Canada’s modern identity, and as Kymlicka notes, the significance of ethnic identity in multicultural Canada remains an important part of “personal identity, informal networks, social status, cultural meanings, and political mobilization (Kymlicka, 2012, p.99)”.

Multiculturalism acts as a primary mechanism through which the Canadian government institutionalizes and manages ethnic relations. It shapes narratives around minority rights and what Kymlicka describes as 'ethnic projects,' which refer to political mobilization based on ethnicity, as discussed in his 2012 work. As policy and as ideology, multiculturalism serves the purpose of perpetuating the myth that Canada is a tolerant, innocent, fair place to live with little to no history of colonialism or present-day racisms. Moreover, in settler-colonial nations like Canada, a nation state founded on the theft of Indigenous land and resources, Indigenous self-determining relationships with their own lands are undermined, and trivialized, while a larger “multicultural” narratives of inclusion, respect, and the celebration of cultural differences are reinforced (St. Denis, 2011).

In this study, I adopt a critical approach to multiculturalism, informed by critical race theory (CRT), to enhance my analysis of parent-child discussions. This is because multiculturalism, often linked with ethnoracial diversity, frequently serves as a stand-in during discussions about race, ethnicity, or cultural identity in Canada. The way participants use the term ‘multicultural’ is particularly relevant to my interest in examining how parents and children

talk about the ethnoburb community of Brampton and about Canada as a whole. Therefore, it is important to scrutinize the claims of multiculturalism, including through the lens of CRT.

Beginning in the 1990s, multiculturalism faced criticism from racialized communities and CRT scholars for its inability to generate significant or tangible improvements in the lives of most Black and non-Indigenous people of colour. Scholars highlighted that multiculturalism, as an officially endorsed federal strategy, endeavors to handle diversity in superficial ways (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002; Fleras, 2014). This approach has had few positive impacts on many peoples' lived experiences of racism, nor has it addressed structural and institutional racisms in Canada. For Indigenous communities, multiculturalism is understood as a policy within the existing settler colonial state that cannot meaningfully address Indigenous sovereignty (St. Denis, 2011). Canadian multicultural frameworks position Indigenous communities alongside other racialized communities, which erases the distinct histories of Indigenous people as original peoples, whose have inherent rights that are not derived through settler colonial law. Indigenous scholars have rejected having their rights and claims asserted through multiculturalism (St. Denis, 2011).

Many critics of Canadian multicultural policy (see Bannerji, 2000; Fleras, 2014; Haque, 2012; Hogarth & Fletcher, 2018; Mackey, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005) note that it promotes a form of diversity devoid of meaningful institutional recognition of the historical and ongoing impacts of racism and relies instead on 'celebratory' ideas of 'minority' cultures and cultural expression. In fact, multicultural discourse can be a way of talking around race; direct reference to specific racisms (e.g. anti-Black racism) are avoided, in favour of the celebratory discourse of diversity. Fleras (2014) asks readers to consider not how multiculturalism facilitates integration but how it works to make "Canada safe *from* diversities and difference" (p. 245) through the

depoliticization of ethnicity and a focus on “sharing, interaction, and participation” (p. 252) at the expense of a focus on structural change.

CRT scholars and critics of multiculturalism advocate for moving beyond narratives that merely celebrate cultural differences. Instead, they emphasize the need to engage in difficult conversations to address racism and racialization, with the goal of achieving a more equitable Canada. Anti-Black racism, to take one example, persists despite the 1985 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. Bannerji (1996) describes how Blackness is marked as criminal, while Whiteness is synonymous with innocence, explaining:

an individual act of violence performed by any black person is seen as a representative act for the whole black community, thus labelling them as criminal, while crime statistics among the white population remain non-representative of whiteness. (p. 123)

In Canada, one of the effects of anti-Black racism is that entire groups and communities are judged based on the appearance of criminalization. Owusu-Bempah (2017) points out the “remarkable consistency” (p. 26) with which negative and stereotypical images of Black people have been reproduced in American culture. Similar negative tropes persist in Canada, despite our official multiculturalism. In fact, CRT theorists suggest that anti-Black and other racisms persist not just *despite* but *because* of multicultural discourse that celebrates “cultural” difference while avoiding discussions of racism and racialization and their routine reproduction in Canadian social life.

In my study, I am interested in the ways that multiculturalism may be employed discursively. Interestingly, the parents mobilized multiculturalism as a way of talking – indirectly rather than directly -- about issues of race, culture, and/or inter-ethnic relations. The intervention of critical race theory, which questions the usefulness of multiculturalism for addressing

persistent racisms in Canada, will help to nuance understandings of the ways that parents and children talk and write in a context of multiculturalism but also about multiculturalism – and will provide historical and contextual insights into how these families talk about their neighbours, community, and about Canada.

CRT and Neoliberalism

Unlike multiculturalism, which has been official policy in Canada since 1985, there is no Canadian Neoliberalism Act. Nonetheless, neoliberalism is a powerful political and economic idea in Canada, as in many other English-speaking Western nations, that shapes our social structures, institutions, and individual beliefs. If a full exploration of the political economy of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this essay, I will briefly note that neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy that promotes free trade, deregulation in the free market, and competition as the primary way of organizing our economy and society (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). As the title of Braedley and Luxton's (2010) book *Neoliberalism in Everyday Life* suggests, the political philosophy of neoliberalism, and routine aspects of daily life as Canadians experience them, are inseparable (p. 5). Neoliberalism is "the driving force behind international economic business practices" (Braedley & Luxton, 2010, p. 5), in ways that free the circulation of capital and business elites, while constraining and controlling the movement of racialized working-class labour, especially across borders. Even in times of crisis, international leaders have reaffirmed their commitments to market principles and refrained from any critique of the underlying assumptions of capitalist ideas (Braedley & Luxton, 2010), where neoliberalism is especially hostile to embedding markets within social welfare states and seeks to minimize state social protections in favour of maximizing profits and so, it is presumed, economic growth and general well-being.

While neoliberalism can be said to be a fundamental organizing principle of society in Canada, so is race, as I have already established. For my argument and research, neoliberalism matters because it works to “reinforce the racial structure of society” (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 248). Racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination are not products of neoliberalism, but they are embedded within it. Colourblind racism, discussed in an above section, is also referred to in some scholarly literature as neoliberal racism (Giroux, 2006), and as Henry et al (2017) write, “This ideology enables neoliberals to advance their specific notions of equal opportunity, objectivity, neutrality and merit (p.14).” Due to its hegemonic nature, neoliberalism shapes how racism and racialization are understood. As Au (2016) writes:

the neoliberal project has reconstructed “anti-racist” as being against any identification around race (and any itinerant signification) in favor of a post-racial identification constructed around freely acting and competing individuals. This interplay of neoliberalism, the reconstitution of “anti-racism” in ways that deny the structural and material realities of racism...coalesce in what I name here as “Meritocracy 2.0.” (p. 40)

Au (2016) connects neoliberalism to meritocracy, a related dominant idea I seek to disrupt through a CRT lens, as I explained above. Given the dominance of neoliberalism and its key ideas—including the pre-eminence of the individual over the collective, and a domination of market economics and valuing of competition in all aspects of life—I expect to see the reproduction of some of these concerns in the everyday lives of parents and students. My aim is to critique the ways that neoliberal ideas of a post-racial society where individuals compete freely for rewards are misaligned with racial and social justice. I delve into an exploration of how the participants in this study, comprising students and parents, navigate the dichotomy

between embracing or challenging the prevailing neoliberal narratives that dictate notions of success and failure.

Communal Cultural Wealth

As noted in the previous section, the prevailing influence of neoliberal ideology has implications not only for how individuals think about success and failure, but also for how families and communities understand success and the future lives of their children. The next section begins to delve deeper into this context, seeking to unravel the intricate connections between neoliberalism and its reverberations in the lives of families. As part of my commitment to a CRT perspective, I centre the agency of racialized people, seeing them not as in “deficit” with respect to dominant White society and culture but as actors and agents with resources. Importantly, I am not denying institutionalized race and racism, or the ways that these systemically support the reproduction of White success in schooling systems and thwart racialized students’ schooling success. I am challenging approaches that frame cultural capital through Bourdieu’s ideas by focusing on the ways that individual racialized students lack the right cultural capital (Childs, Finnie and Mueller, 2018; Lane and Taber, 2012; Lehmann, 2007; Tan, Peng and Lyu, 2019). Instead, I follow Yosso (2005) in centering the concept of community cultural wealth; this is a CRT framework that reorients away from a focus on the individual to a conceptual acknowledgement that “communities of color” (p. 69) are abundant in cultural wealth, which serves to sustain, motivate, and support them, even as they navigate systems and institutions that are systemically and institutionally racist.

Yosso (2005) details six kinds of community cultural wealth, where I focus on the three most relevant for my research and findings (pp. 77–78):

Aspirational capital – This is the capacity for people to dream, hope, and expect that they will accomplish their goals, even when faced with barriers. It is a form of mental resilience and consists of a “culture of possibility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). It allows one to maintain high expectations even when life circumstances do not offer an easy pathway to success. This salient form of community cultural wealth is referred to often by both parents and children in the data; this is taken up in Chapters 4 and 5.

Familial capital – This is the support and strength that comes from being rooted in a strong kinship network, with shared histories, extended family and community connections, and broad networks of support and encouragement. Many students and parents in this study, for example, mentioned older cousins and other kin as their first go-to for support with schooling, homework, or information about post-secondary options. Yosso’s notion of familial capital is similar to the notion of ‘familismo,’ a concept that is regularly drawn on in studies of Chicano students in the U.S. to explain a source of strength and resilience for students (Rocha et al., 2022). This cultural value stresses a sense of obligation to care for, spend time with, and remain close to one’s family, and to make financial contributions to the household.

Navigational capital – This is made up of the knowledge and abilities it takes to successfully navigate institutions and policies, especially in times that are challenging or in the face of barriers. As Yosso points out, universities were “not created with Communities of Color in mind” (2005, p. 80). As a critical race scholar, I am especially interested in those barriers that are structural and/or institutional, and which relate to race/racism. Navigational capital includes understanding how to access resources and information, understanding how to work through barriers, and skills for advocacy and communication within institutions. The kinds of institutional processes that immigrant, first-generation, or other foreign-born people must

navigate in Canada are common to their circumstances, and communities build institutional knowledge about how to navigate these processes.

First-generation Canadian parents may have important aspirational capital insofar as they place their children's educational attainment at the centre of their lives, maintaining a steadfast focus on the eventual success of their children through education. They may rely on familial capital to support their children's educational goals, since many first- and second-generation students seek academic help from siblings, cousins, or other family members. Parents, often educated in non-Canadian and/or non-English schooling systems, may have inequitable access to navigational capital, given limited personal experience with Canadian educational institutions, especially at the post-secondary level. It reflects the ways that racialized parents may be socially excluded (Galabuzi, 2011) from accessing resources, for example, information about Canadian schools, programs, and pathways. In the language of Yosso (2005), they may not have acquired the navigational capital they need to offer their children advice and expertise about post-secondary and career pathways. This means that navigational capital is especially important as a community resource – families rely on extended family members to guide younger people through their schooling experiences, which can include challenges such as “racially-hostile university campuses” (Yosso, 2005, p.80). Robson et al. (2018) find that “Black, Latino and Southeast Asian students were less prepared for post-secondary education than White students” (p. 39). James and Taylor (2008, 2022) show that racialized students are cognizant of the barriers they may face in achieving their educational goals, which “may include experience with racism, discrimination, and contradictions between home and school life, at the same time that students are negotiating shifting identities...These challenges are often not visible to university instructors and other personnel” (James & Taylor, 2022, p. 10). However, there are often

underrecognized strengths and resources in families that support success, and Yosso (2005) acknowledges that “communities of color” (p. 69) are abundant in cultural wealth, which serves to sustain, motivate, and support them as they navigate systems and institutions that are systemically and institutionally racist. It is these strengths and resources I wish to highlight in the analysis that follows in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Summary

I use CRT as the theoretical foundation of this dissertation because of its strength in highlighting how race and racism take shape in Canada. CRT provides the most evidence-based and coherent expression of how racial thinking is entrenched in the structures of everyday life, and especially in the laws, norms, and practices of the institutions that influence our ideas and shape our relationships, including within education and schooling. This chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and how these are employed in the analysis to follow to challenge the assumptions of meritocracy, neoliberalism, and multiculturalism. CRT, which originated in American legal scholarship, posits that racism is endemic to society and that race is a social construct. CRT-informed research also values the stories of people of color as valuable sources of knowledge for understanding how racism operates in everyday life and larger social institutions.

This chapter also discussed the myth of meritocracy, which suggests that hard work and talent determine success. I assert that meritocracy rationalizes social disparities by portraying society as unbiased and racially impartial, and I call back to data from Chapter 1 that reveal significant differences in educational and occupational attainment among racialized communities in Canada, challenging the myth of meritocracy. I also discuss how CRT helps challenge the

assumptions and beliefs embedded in neoliberalism and multiculturalism, which work to reinforce the racial structure of social relations in Canada. While multiculturalism facilitates a focus on celebrating diversity, multicultural discourse can also be a way of avoiding direct reference to specific racisms. CRT helps to illuminate the weaknesses and limitations of meritocratic, multicultural and neoliberal assumptions about fairness, equal opportunity, and colourblindness.

Finally, the chapter introduced the concept of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2015), which acknowledges that communities of color are abundant in cultural wealth, even if this is not often recognized and considered in some of the literature on first- and second-generation racialized students. This wealth includes aspirational capital (the capacity to sustain optimistic hopes and dreams), familial capital (support and strength from kinship networks), and navigational capital (the ability to navigate institutions and policies). I posit that these forms of capital are beneficial to racialized students and their parents as they navigate the education system and work to achieve their goals, and these concepts will be recalled in the analysis of data in later chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodologies

Introduction

As detailed in Chapter 2, critical race theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework that informs my methodological analysis of data that emerged from the use of qualitative research methods. The qualitative research methods (the approaches used to collect the data) in this dissertation are participatory action research (PAR, using focus groups and written reflections) and youth participatory action research (YPAR, consisting of student-led interviews with their parents). I used thematic and critical discourse analysis, informed by CRT, to conduct the qualitative analysis that is laid out in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the key tenets of critical discourse theory, and thematic analysis, as explored by sociologists Bischoping and Gazso (2016). I describe how these apply to the data analyses that I take up in other chapters of this dissertation. Next, I review the details of the original SSHRC-funded (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) research that provided the basis for this dissertation, including a description of the school and students I worked with, followed by a summary of the qualitative and participatory research methods used in this dissertation and details about the methodologies used for data collection (interviews, focus groups, and participant observation/field notes). The SSHRC-funded study from which this dissertation's data is drawn was designed using methodologies from participatory action research (PAR) and youth participatory action research (YPAR), and these will also be discussed in this chapter.

Critical Discourse Analysis

My methodology is rooted in the scholarship and traditions of critical discourse analysis (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 132) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Evans, 2018).

I draw on them together as appropriate and useful analytical tools to investigate my research questions because they allow me to consider both what people say while also analysing the contexts in which their ideas are expressed. Since CDA is now a broad, contested field, and a full discussion of these debates is beyond the purview of my research, my exploration here considers this approach in Bischooping and Gazso's useful formulation. As they explain, CDA is rooted in Michel Foucault's concept of discourse, which encompasses "texts and the rules and structures that account for their production" (Bischooping & Gazso, 2016, p. 132). Foucauldian discourse analysis focuses on how individuals communicate using ideas that are made available to them through shared discourses in a group or society. In this dissertation, for example, the shared discourse around meritocracy, which arises from the formal and informal communications in our supposedly meritocratic but actually racist society, is a focus of analysis. Foucault was interested in how "talk reflects discourse, as opposed to individuals' meanings" (Bischooping & Gazso, 2016, p. 135), and this is a useful framing for my analysis because I am seeking to learn about the frameworks, ideas, and discourses (specifically post-racial meritocratic and neoliberal) that these students and parents use in their speech and writing.

Bischooping and Gazso (2016) highlight three main analytical strategies common to Foucauldian discourse analysis. The first is to "deconstruct the power-knowledge relations embedded in a discourse and its potential effects" (p. 138). The second is to reveal how discourses limit or make possible different kinds of talk in different social interactions and contexts. In other words, this analytical lens asks, "What is sayable," (p. 139) within a particular set of constraints, such as socially constructed frameworks or knowledge systems. Given that this dissertation considers ideas and narratives related to meritocracy and neoliberalism, and how much, how little, or in what ways these show up in research participants' talk and writing, these

two purposes are relevant because they help me to ask: what power-knowledge relations are expressed in parental and student talk about their education and educational futures? And what is sayable for these parents and students, as racialized first- and second-generation immigrants concerned for the educational futures of their children, the students? A third purpose of discourse analysis is “to expose how a seemingly coherent discourse is ruptured, haphazard, or tactically polyvalent” (p. 139). This third analytical strategy will be useful as I am seeking to disrupt the tendency for multicultural discourse to go unquestioned in Canada, and I can better do this by pointing to the ways that seemingly coherent discourses, for instance, about meritocracy, are ruptured by the realities of racism, or how the term multicultural and its associated ideas can be used in “tactically polyvalent” ways to carry multiple implications or meaning. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, I am interested in how the ‘seemingly coherent’ narratives of meritocracy, multiculturalism and neoliberalism rupture when viewed through a lens of critical race theory, which interrupts assumptions of race neutrality, an even playing field, and competitiveness as a desirable way to determine how resources are distributed in a society. In these systems, success is individually achieved and deserved. Using critical race theory, I will examine how the everyday realities of life in Brampton, especially racism, ruptured the seeming coherency of meritocratic, multicultural and neoliberal discourse and how this impacted the research participants’ educational (and other) aspirations, plans and intended outcomes.

My focus on discourse (talk, speech, and writing) assumes that discourses reflect ideologies, and that discourse happens in socially constructed contexts. Further, within societies, hegemonic power means that the ideologies of dominant groups are more widely accepted and other ideas are considered subordinate. Critical discourse analysis situates discourse within an interrelated network of social systems, “*reflecting on the relation of discourse to other*

dimensions of the social order that are networked with it, and that it represents, including means of production, social identities, and values” (Bischooping & Gazso, 2016, p. 147; original emphasis). In my approach to critical discourse analysis, I acknowledge both the material realities, such as financial resources or lack thereof, and the hegemonic ideologies - like the belief that individual ‘hard work’ is of the utmost importance - that shape how research participants write and talk about schooling and education, and that these may inform their plans, motivate their actions, and act as complex motivating and constraining influences in their lives. For instance, Chapters 4 and 5 discuss how many of the families were focused on the students pursuing specific professional careers that are considered high-status and high paying, such as doctor, lawyer, and engineer. In the case of this dissertation, critical discourse analysis allows for an exploration/investigation into the ideas and concepts that inform these stated goals, beliefs or preferences, in order to better understand the complexities of people’s lives and how they make decisions about schooling, education and other aspects of creating a successful adult life for the next generation of their family in Canada. I posit that as dominant narratives in Canada, meritocracy, multiculturalism and neoliberalism are relevant to the data, since these terms and ideas are often applied to racialized people, cultures, and communities. Critical discourse analysis is an entry point into exploring the deployment of these hegemonic ideologies.

Thematic analysis has no direct relationship to CDA, insofar as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Evans, 2018) is not discipline specific, and can be used to analyze “semi-structured interview data within a broad range of disciplines in the social sciences, including sociology and the sociology of education” (Evans, 2018, p. 2). Thematic analysis is a tool for examining and organizing data, using themes, but it is not imbued with any specific aim to reveal power relations, hidden or multiple meanings, or the workings of social structures. In this

dissertation, thematic analysis is used to identify themes consistent with CDA through a CRT lens, such as themes about experiences of race/racism, identity negotiation, and immigrant experiences in families. Thematic analysis is a useful tool for analyzing the dissertation's interview data, much of it rooted in interviews and concerned with education. Evans (2018) suggests that thematic analysis is especially well suited for “examining the ways that people make meaning out of their experiences, as well as how they construct their social worlds through meaning-making” (p. 3). It does this by retaining “a focus on the ways in which these experiences will be informed by their material experiences and contexts” (Evans, 2018, p. 3). In analyzing the data, thematic analysis aids in articulating and organizing a discussion around broader shared concepts and/or themes, such as community relations, beliefs about success and career pathways, experiences informed by migration stories, and other themes that are present in the transcripts and discussed in Chapters 4 to 6.

In keeping with most CDA thematic analysis, all the data I analyzed in this dissertation is in text form, and therefore appropriate for critical discourse and thematic analysis through a critical race theory lens. The analysis is informed by my conceptual framework, as explained in Chapter 2, which draws attention to broader discursive contexts, especially meritocracy, multiculturalism and neoliberalism. The talk data was transcribed, and I worked with text transcripts, not original recordings. The written data is in both handwritten and typed text forms. I sorted the transcripts by their respective data collection methodologies (i.e., focus groups, interviews, essays), and worked first with a set of printed hard copies of the transcripts to colour-code and make notes. A second set of printed hard copies were used to handwrite the ‘clean’ version of the codes and notes. After this process, I went back to the digital versions to copy and

paste (or screenshot) text from various transcripts and placed these in digital folders sorted by topics and themes.

The SSHRC-Funded “Sharing Experiences” Project

The Sharing Experiences project began as a research partnership between the York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC) at York University and Streetsview High School. The school administration recognized the importance of assessing the relationship between a new school and the newly constructed community it served, and this research was undertaken with the understanding that it would provide valuable information to the school so it could ensure it was meeting the needs and expectations of parents and children. To that end, a research team was formed that included Professor Carl James, the school principal, a classroom teacher, and me as research assistant, as well as other graduate student research assistants who helped with transcriptions and focus groups. In Year 1, September 2010–June 2011, the focus of our research was the school’s relationship with the surrounding community and on parents’ engagement with activities and events at the school. We also investigated how the students conceived of the relationship between the school and other communities (e.g., religious, ethnoracial, language, and cultural associations or groups) they belonged to. At the end of Year 1, the research team (including myself) met to plan research goals, create research questions, and devise a plan to carry out data collection in Year 2.

In Year 2, September 2011–June 2012, we shifted our focus to examine the educational experiences of the students and the aspirations of the students and their families, and more closely investigate their parents’ thoughts about the school. To gather data, I was embedded in the classroom two days a week for one school year (September to June). I also spent two afternoons riding buses to/from the school to shopping areas in Brampton that the students from

the school often frequented; I attended three events at the school during the year; I visited local stores 1-2 times per month; and I walked around the neighbourhood where the school is located 1-2 times a month. After my days at the school, I often stopped to do errands locally (e.g., purchasing groceries, visiting a pharmacy, or ordering takeout food) because it was convenient given my travel route to/from my home to the school, and it gave me a feel for the community context.

I devised my research questions for this dissertation based on these experiences, particularly my time in the classroom. These Grade 12 students often returned to the topics of success and the role their parents played in their education. Unsurprisingly, given this was the beginning of a transitional period of their lives, they were particularly focused on life after high school. I found them to be very interested and thoughtful about their aspirations, concerns, and expectations for the future. This research examines both the students' and their parents' ideas about success and education because having both perspectives help to shed light on the ways that these important and life-shaping ideas are communicated and acted upon by families. The parent data also helps inform and contextualize what the children have to say about success and education.

In the original SSHRC-funded study, the research design used aspects of participatory action research to work within the school community to allow the principal, classroom teacher, and students to shape the research questions and to plan and participate in data collection. Methodologies included focus groups facilitated by graduate students; interviews between students and their parents; written essays collected from students; and in-person observation. I did not design the study but was a research assistant who facilitated focus groups and conducted the in-person aspects of the research with students. In-person participatory work included:

participant observation in a Grade 12 classroom twice a week for one school year; training students on the use of recording equipment and on how to conduct interviews; and working with students to decide the topic for their written essays.

The data for this dissertation consist of four sources of qualitative written and talk data, collected as part of the larger Sharing Experiences project. The qualitative data consist of:

- 4 focus groups conducted with students at the school (October and November 2010; and November 2011)
- 22 handwritten assignments by Grade 12 students titled “What Is Success” (completed in May and June 2012)
- 15 interviews that Grade 12 students conducted in their homes with their parents (March 2011)
- Research notes, project memos, primary documents, and records kept as part of the SSHRC project (2010–2012)

The York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC) was, at the time, a faculty-based organized research unit (ORU) at York University, under the leadership of Carl James. In 2009–2010, YCEC undertook a knowledge mobilization project, funded through a SSHRC Insight Grant, that aimed to increase knowledge about suburban school and community challenges, strategies for success, and the retention and engagement of students. The project aimed to conduct 24 meetings over 12 months in 2010–2011 with teachers, students, school administrators, and community members, as well as to do outreach and knowledge sharing through workshops, engagement with parent groups, and academic conferences. The project began by recognizing that suburban schools face different challenges than urban schools do, and it was initiated at a time when many urban first-generation and/or racialized families were

leaving urban neighbourhoods to seek out social mobility, more space, and all the other features that suburban communities offer.¹²

In preparing for the Sharing Experiences project, principal investigators Carl James and Don Dippo found that parents in the community of interest for the study, Brampton, ON, consisted of two groups: newcomers,¹³ and settled immigrants¹⁴ who had moved out of urban communities to the outer suburbs. Some non-European newcomers had chosen to move directly to an outer suburb because of existing community supports (an existing diasporic community) and other positive perceptions, and optimism, about the lifestyle and opportunities these communities offer (James & Saul, 2009; Logan, 2003; Preston & Wong, 2002; Troper, 2017). For many of the resettled families, the move signalled upward social mobility.

Within the context of this aspirational move to the ethnoburb, for many of these families, schools were an important long-term point of contact with the larger racialized newcomer and settler immigrant community. For this reason, the Sharing Experiences project took an explicit view that:

schools, and by implication teachers, have a responsibility to find ways to engage with these new members of the communities, and to work with parents, and social services providers to develop strategies and action plans that will address the social needs and educational aspirations of the parents thereby giving attention to the reasons and opportunities for which the parents moved into these suburban communities. (Dippo & James, 2009; see Appendix A for project description)

¹² See Appendix A for a complete and detailed description of the Sharing Experiences project.

¹³ People who arrive to Canada and settle in Brampton as their first Canadian place of residence.

¹⁴ People who lived elsewhere in Canada before moving to Brampton.

The Sharing Experiences project had an important scholarly relationship to other work undertaken at YCEC, namely, the School and Community Engaged Education (SCEE) project, a three-year partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) that began in 2008 to investigate ways of improving students' school experiences, and as a result, their educational engagement, in the Jane-Finch community. The SCEE project provided context for the Sharing Experiences project, with the latter focused on meeting the need for more research with suburban youth.

Importantly, my involvement in this project was informed by my participation in other YCEC initiatives, since YCEC was engaged in many multi-year, community- and school-based research, and knowledge dissemination projects in the geographical region where York University is situated. I was fortunate to have completed research for this, and other, YCEC initiatives that together composed a network of related and overlapping queries into school–community life in the area. These initiatives facilitated many informal and formal contacts and conversations that helped improve the quality of the Sharing Experiences project immeasurably. We also benefitted from the fact that many faculty, staff, and graduate students at YCEC were also immigrant, racialized, and/or first- and second-generation Canadians who lived in, or grew up in, the communities we researched and worked in.

A Description of the School

The school that I spent time in for this research was new and spacious, and located in a brick building on a large corner lot with two parking lots, and a large outdoor track at the back. Beyond the school property on one side was a community park, with a cricket pitch. A middle school and elementary school were located within two short residential blocks. Most of the area around the school consisted of residential streets with uniform brick housing of various sizes and

densities. At the time of the research, the school was graduating only the second Grade 12 class in its history. Streetsview High was built as a result of population growth in the area, and many of the Grade 12 students in the class had begun their high school years (Grade 9) at one of two other large schools and were redirected to Streetsview in Grade 10 or 11. The school looked modern and it was fully accessible, with wide hallways and a central elevator, and it was technologically advanced, notably, students had access to tablets, computers, and other technology in many classrooms. I also wrote in my notes that the central atrium reminded me of a panopticon,¹⁵ with a central staircase and upper balconies that presented a clear view of everything around and below.

Most of the students lived nearby, as evidenced by the small number (less than 200 out of 1300) who lived far enough to be bussed to school. Many students were dropped off in the mornings by their parents, though it seemed most students were not picked up and, instead, made their way wherever they had to go after school on their own or in small groups. The school day ran from 8:50 a.m. to 3:10 p.m., with two morning periods, a common one-hour lunch break, and two afternoon periods. I observed that the suburban school was more than a 15-minute walk from commercial businesses and transit routes, so most students stayed on school grounds for lunches.

The Classroom, the Teacher, and the Students

During the 2011–2012 school year, Streetsview had a population of over 1300 students, of which the Grade 9 and 10 cohorts made up more than half the school population. I was embedded in a second-period class (10:03 a.m. to 11:33 a.m. daily) with approximately 25-30

¹⁵ Foucault and Sheridan (1995) wrote about a prison design in which a centrally located guard could supervise inmates positioned in cells arranged in a semi-circular shape around the guard. It is an “architectural apparatus” (Foucault & Sheridan, 1995, p. 200) in which power functions automatically because of permanent surveillance. In other words, when people know they are being watched, they behave in socially sanctioned ways that conform to rules and expectations. Why does insight matter for your study? offer a one-line explanation.

Grade 12 students each semester¹⁶. The course was aimed at university-bound students, and the students were all racialized non-White and from first- and second-generation families. There were more young women students than young men in the class most days; about 20 women students showed up each day, and most engaged and spoke up in class regularly. The 5–7 young men that attended regularly were, in general, less talkative with me and with the teacher. The students sat in single desks, facing the teacher at the front. The teacher was a young, friendly, well-liked South Asian woman. In my year at the school, I noticed that most of the teachers were racialized Black, South Asian, and East Asian. There were several White teachers, and the principal was a White woman who spoke frequently in meetings about the importance of hiring teachers whose racial identities reflected those of the students, and she openly invited inquiry and potential critique from the research team. This principal also expressed interest in culturally appropriate programs that would be well-received by the community, and she was a big driver of, and collaborative contributor to, the research. The course was focused on introducing students to the fields of sociology, psychology, and anthropology, and topics and projects were generally about social inequity, identity, and social problems and issues.

Parents and their children as first- and second-generation Canadians:

Of the 17 adults who participated in the parent/child interviews, 16 were foreign-born, and one was born in Canada, making Ms. Harris the only second-generation Canadian parent in the study. The children were not asked to reveal any personal information to the study team, and as such, their country of birth was not recorded. Based on my recollections, field notes, and evidence in the data, such as students' references back to their previous schooling experiences in Canada, the

¹⁶ Some students rarely attended class; others changed classes in the semester, so there was some fluctuation in the size of the class, with approximately 25 students present on any given day.

children were a mix of first- and second-generation Canadians. Those children who were immigrants to Canada (and as such, first-generation Canadians) had likely arrived in Canada at a young enough age to do most of their schooling here, as evidenced by their references back to elementary school in Canada. I also do not recall hearing any students who had audible non-English accents in their speech; they spoke and sounded to me as first-language, English speaking Canadian youth. Statistics Canada data from 2016 shows that of all new immigrants who settled in Brampton, children under 14 years of age make up 22% of people (Statistics Canada, 2021b), and so there is evidence in national data that many people do immigrate to Brampton before high school age, as many of the participants in this research may have.

Research and Data Collection Process

The data for this dissertation was collected in the second half of the Sharing Experiences project; we called this portion the “Conversations in Education” project. This research was conducted from September 2011 to June 2012. After the first year of the Sharing Experiences project (September 2010–June 2011), the research team revised its approach to incorporate insights and feedback received in Year 1 of the project. The following is quoted from an internal memo in September 2011:

One of the schools we have been working with, Streetsview High,¹⁷ has expressed a strong interest in extending our work beyond the originally proposed public events to engage directly with students to get a sense of how they conceptualize and navigate school and community. With the support of the school’s principal, vice-principals, and course teacher, we plan to work with the students in a course which combines

¹⁷ Pseudonym

Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology. The teacher of the course has indicated a willingness to integrate our research questions into the curriculum.... This requires an adjustment to our methodology to allow us to interact directly and hold tape-recorded focus group sessions with students...To this end, we will be encouraging the students to engage in Youth Participatory Action Research. According to Cammarota and Fine (2008) in *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participant Action Research in Motion*, “youth participatory action research provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (p. 2).

Because we will be audio-recording some of our interactions with the students, we will distribute a letter asking for consent from parents. These recordings will be transcribed and used in the analysis of the data and may be accessed by the YCEC research team and participating teachers. No personally identifying information will be collected and no identifying details (including recorded voices) will be released in any resource, report or publication that arises from this research. After three years, the audio-recordings will be destroyed. (Research team internal memo, Sept. 2021)

The expression of interest from Streetsview High offered a valuable opportunity to develop an innovative research plan. The research team made shared decisions about the overall activities and direction for the research in Year 2. The team included the school principal, Carl James from YCEC, the classroom teacher, two PhD student researchers (at the time), Selom Chapman-Nyaho, and me. We held regular meetings during the year to share progress and plan

next steps. The result was a clear research plan with dates and activities planned several months in advance. As I was already a research assistant on the project in Year 1 (2010–2011), I was able to work on the direct classroom-based, participatory action research with the Grade 12 students. I made 17 class visits in the first term, and 20 in the second, plus four additional visits to the school for meetings and to hold focus groups. On average, I spent two days per week in class with the Grade 12 students and their teacher from September 2011 to June 2012.

The following is a summary of the activities I undertook at the school as part of the data collection for this dissertation from 2011–2012:

In September/October 2012, I spent 2–3 days per week in a Grade 12 “Challenge and Change” class.¹⁸ The course introduces students to the fields of social science research, sociology, and psychology, so our research goals fit nicely with the students’ curricular focus in the class on topics like race/racism, equity/equality, access to education, and critical discussions of various social issues. Furthermore, students elected to enrol in the course (as opposed to being mandated), and there was strong interest in what we were doing from the teacher and these students. For most of the first month in class, I conducted observations, noting the ways students went about doing their work, how they interacted with each other, and how they got along with the teacher, Ms. Gupta.¹⁹ I kept field notes and daily activity logs and had casual conversations with the students. The goal was to familiarize myself with the course, teacher, and students, and

¹⁸ This course has been in the Ontario curriculum since the time of the research in 2010–2012, and the course description remains consistent. It reads in part: “Grade 12 Challenge & Change focuses on the use of social science theories, perspectives, and methodologies to understand and explain the societal impact of shifts in attitudes and behaviour. Throughout this course, students will critically analyze how and why cultural, social, and behavioural patterns change over time. They will explore the ideas of social theorists and use these ideas to analyze causes of, and responses to, challenges such as technological change, deviance, and global inequalities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020).

¹⁹ Pseudonym

establish rapport. It should be noted that my work was greatly facilitated by the very positive relationship between the students and Ms. Gupta; the whole class (especially Ms. Gupta) was positive, welcoming, curious, and friendly to me. Many of the students asked me questions about university programs and applications, which I noted in my field notes. I also spent several days in September getting to know the area of Brampton where the school is located: I took walks around the neighbourhood and rode transit twice to and from the school to a local shopping plaza.

In October 2012, I spent five full class periods working with the students on understanding the research project, and on how to conduct interviews with their parents. The students helped to draft the interview questions,²⁰ and they provided feedback and a written reflection about their perceptions of their parents' and families' hopes for them after high school. To prepare for the interviews, students learned about social science research and discussed examples of research done with youth. They also practiced using open and closed questions, and they conducted mock interviews with each other.

Over a period of six weeks in October and November 2012, students took turns taking home tape recorders and interviewing their parents. Full transcripts of all the interviews (with names and personal information removed) were produced by research assistants at YCEC by the end of January 2013. Research continued on this project in the Winter/Spring 2012 term, during which students completed written assignments, which form part of the data set.

Qualitative Research Methods

The data for this dissertation was gathered using qualitative research design and methodologies. Aspers and Corte (2019) define one of the aims of qualitative research -- as

²⁰ A copy of the demographic and open-ended questions is in Appendix C.

distinct from quantitative research that emphasizes the generation of statistical or number-based data -- as “an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied” (p. 139). While I am interested in communicating this research to “the scientific community” of social science and sociology of education scholars, the critical race theory approach also requires the work be helpful and meaningful to the community as it centres their voices, so that analyses presented in this dissertation ‘make sense’ to those who participated in the research. The iterative process that guided my own research included forming ideas about the classroom in my initial observations, then changing and refining those ideas, especially with respect to the students and parents’ aspirations through further qualitative methods, including focus groups, interviews and written assignments. In addition to seeking to provide improved understanding to the scientific community, we sought, as previously noted, to provide insights useful to the school, parents and students.

The design, methodologies, and procedures used here fall into a subfield of sociology that has an overarching focus on, and grand narrative about, how schooling and education impact life chances (Ward & Delamont, 2020). This field originated in the post-war period with a strong focus on quantitative studies (mostly statistical data relating to social mobility and various aspects of inequality); however, its qualitative arm began to grow in the 1960s with analyses of “interactions, the knowledge being transmitted and acquired, and ways in which the actors make sense of their interactions, their social relationships and the transmission of knowledge and skills” (Ward & Delamont, 2020, p. 6). In this dissertation, I participate in this subfield, as it has evolved, by examining how the world looks to the participants, through an analysis of what they say, while keeping in mind the social contexts of their communities and of dominant ideologies.

For this reason, I am focused on research participants' goals and motivations—as expressed in statements they make about their hopes and futures—as well as how they resist or adhere to dominant discourses about schooling, education, career expectations, and the notion of success, in their talk and writing. Importantly, in undertaking this project, I also hoped that engaging in the qualitative research process would help them better know and understand themselves and their social world. So, the aim of the research was not principally to extract data from the community (Sherman & Webb, 1988) but to work together to better understand the pressures and messages these young people and their families take in about schooling and education (keeping the social and cultural context in mind), and how these ideas impact their decisions, as guided by critical race theory.

As mentioned previously, the SSHRC-funded study from which this dissertation's data is drawn was designed using methodologies from participatory action research (PAR) and youth participatory action research (YPAR). YPAR takes a social justice-oriented approach; it involves not only research but education and action. As Hall (1992) puts it, "It sees no contradiction between goals of collective empowerment and the deepening of social knowledge" (p. 16).

A fundamental concern of YPAR is the role of so-called experts in research and ensuring that community members are recognized for their own areas of expertise, rooted in individual and community-based lived experiences. Cammarota and Fine (2008) write about how this makes YPAR different from other research methodologies:

The first and most important difference is the "researcher." In most PAR projects, the researcher is not a lone investigator but individuals in a collective.... Researchers engage in ongoing conversation and reflection with others, across generations, similarly poised to inquire and act. Research is therefore a collective process enriched by the multiple

perspectives of several researchers working together. Second, the researcher, or more appropriately, researchers, are more or less “insiders” in a given situation. In other words, they are the stakeholders within a particular institution, organization, or community. (p. 6)

The research team involved in the Sharing Experiences project consisted of a group of stakeholders who were ‘insiders,’ in terms of the community research context and as members of school communities, although as noted in my statement about my positionality, I was also an outsider in some respects, since I was 10 years or so older than the students, and I am not Black or South Asian, nor male, and I also do not share many of their lived experiences. Of those involved in elaborating the research, only the school principal was White, which is to say that the majority of the researchers, including community members, were racialized, and also shared first- or second-generation status with the research participants. Cammarota and Fine (2008) point out that “stakeholders participating in PAR projects tend to be critical race researchers, adhering closely to the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet of Intersectionality” (p. 6). Dr. James and the research assistants are all scholars of critical race theory, and the intersectional identities of the research participants were central to how we thought about and executed all aspects of the project.

During the in-class portion of the project (Year 2), I worked directly with students to shape the research, in particular, data collection of parental interviews and accompanying written pieces. The in-class participatory research work also provided an opportunity to directly engage in critical education with the participants (Powers & Tiffany, 2006), through the sharing of information about the project, training the students in qualitative research interviewing, and co-creating the questions and interview format with the students. Students were not simply

instructed to go and collect information; several days were spent explaining the research project and goals and engaging in learning and practice activities. The class discussed and incorporated the questions they wanted to ask and information they wanted to collect into a data collection strategy that included two individual written pieces per student plus the interviews with their parents, which were done at home.

The data collection for this dissertation is a subset of the activities that formed the larger SSHRC-funded research. In partnership with the YCEC, the school and research team delivered several responsive activities as the research went on. These took the form of workshops and information nights aimed at the parents; and graduate student panels, in-class ‘meet and greets’ with graduate students, and a trip to York University for the Grade 12 students. These activities are not included in the dissertation but are mentioned to describe the larger context of activities through which I spent time with these students.

Child/Parent Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are a very commonly used method of data collection in the social sciences. However, the interview data for this dissertation was not collected using a typical researcher-to-participant interview process; consistent with Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) the student participants did the interviews with their parents (Marvasti & Tanner, 2020). The interviews that students conducted were semi-structured, relying on a mix of open-ended questions and information-seeking questions (e.g., ‘Where did you go to school?’), and leaving space for dialogue and conversation in addition to answering the questions. Students developed the questions in class through a facilitated process that included lessons on open/closed questions and on interview skills. The goal was to elicit more descriptive information from parents about their past schooling and education experiences and their thoughts about their children’s

schooling, education, and future plans and prospects.²¹ The interviews took place in the students' homes, and some conducted their interviews in a language other than English; these students translated their parents' responses as they gave each answer. The English portions of interviews were transcribed.

It is important to elaborate on these interviews, as this procedure is atypical in qualitative research, and (at the time of writing) I have not found any other studies in which students conducted interviews with their parents themselves. The decision to proceed in this way was influenced by the YPAR approach to qualitative research design. The research team was interested in knowing what parents thought about the school and community, and about their children's educational pathways. Since these students were in Grade 12, we also knew it was important and beneficial for parents to discuss the topic of post-secondary transitions and education/career planning with their children. In a 2020 paper, Covarrubias et al. explain that "findings with 169 students...revealed that first-generation students reported having less conversations about college with parents than continuing-generation students" (p. 465). The same study also showed that there is a potential benefit to having these conversations because "For first-generation students, conversations about college predicted more positive self-concepts, which predicted higher grades" (Covarrubias et al., 2020, p. 465). Wang and Nuru (2017) found that conversations about post-secondary plans are 'turning points' in the lives of first-generation students, and that family communication provides important support for young people who are in the transitional period between high school and post-secondary schooling. Thus, the decision to teach students how to conduct the interviews themselves was beneficial for a few reasons: it was potentially helpful to families who needed to discuss this life transition; it facilitated parents

²¹ See Appendix C for the full list of interview questions that students prepared for their parents.

speaking in their language of choice; and it helped meet the goals of YPAR by removing interactions between parents and researchers with whom parents were unfamiliar.

A total of 15 parent-child interviews, which include individual 17 adults (because two were interviewed in pairs) are included in this dissertation. Many of the students completed interviews too late to have them included²². Their interviews were not graded; this is perhaps why many students did not complete them or submitted them late – they perhaps were not motivated to do work that had no grade, and/or perhaps they were prioritizing other (graded) assignments. Two of the adults interviewed by students were, respectively, an aunt and an uncle. The students informed me these were adults they lived with, and who played a parenting role in their education and a decision-making role in their life; they are referred to as ‘parents’ in this study. The parent participants all had a child enrolled in the Grade 12 class we were working with for the SSHRC research. Each parent signed a letter of consent to have their interview recorded, transcribed, and included in the research. No parent refused consent. Bauer and Gaskell (2020) suggest that qualitative interviewing is useful for learning about a range of views on a topic, and for learning about what topics are important to research participants in a given social milieu. However, they also note that “there is an upper limit to the number of interviews that it is necessary to conduct and possible to analyse. For the single researcher this is somewhere between 15 and 25 individual interviews and some six to eight focus group discussions” (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 7). This dissertation follows these suggested guidelines closely with 17 semi-structured parent-child interviews, though two recordings were lost due to students incorrectly using the equipment, so Chapter 5 draws from 15 transcribed interviews.

²² While the high school semester ended on Dec. 23, 2011, and many students submitted their schoolwork (including their parent interview recordings) near the end of the term. However, for the graduate students working on the project, this end of December deadline had to include having transcriptions completed in order to stay on the project’s planned timeline for various research activities.

The Parent/Caregiver Participants

Students were asked to interview one or both parents, or an adult caregiver who lives with them and helps make decisions about their schooling. Several students lived in multi-family households and considered members of their extended families (e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles, older cousins) to be ‘caregivers’ and ‘decision-makers’ in their lives. In 13 cases, only one parent was interviewed. As previously mentioned above, two of the adults were primary caregiver (e.g., aunt) who played decision-making roles in the lives of the children but were not their parents.²³

The group of parents/caregivers interviewed was very diverse. Most of the parents were born in and had attended primary school in another country (not Canada), and some had attended high school outside of Canada. All the parents and children are racialized as non-White. It is notable that while the more than fifty students I interacted with in the classroom over two semesters were majority South Asian (more than 50%), the group of parents whose children completed their interview assignment on time are majority Black and quite culturally diverse, with roots in East and West Africa, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. Of the 17 individual adults in the data (some interviewed in pairs), 13 are Black, two are South Asian, one is East Asian, and one is Guyanese and self-identified as “Brown.” The countries the parents were schooled in, and migrated from, included: Guyana (2), India (2), Somalia (2), Ethiopia (1), Jamaica (4), Vietnam (1), Ghana (1), England (1), and Italy (1). The two parents who did their elementary schooling in England and Italy self-identified as Black and Jamaican, respectively, and are first-generation Canadians via migration through Europe. Here is a table that lists the

²³ A copy of the open-ended parent interview questions is in Appendix C.

adult participant pseudonyms (alphabetical order), the student/child who conducted the interview, and some information about the adult's education and country of origin:

Table of Adult/Child Interview Pseudonyms:

Adult interviewed by student/child & pseudonyms used.	Adults' country of origin and ethnicity	Adults' highest level of education completed	Will the child be the first in the family to attend post-secondary schooling?
1. Mrs. Abdulali with son, Yasir.	Somalia (Black), immigrant.	Completed high school in Somalia.	Yes.
2. Mr. Abebe with daughter, Halima.	Ethiopia, Black, immigrant.	Attended college in Ethiopia; did not complete his studies due to political conflict.	No.
3. Mrs. Batra with son, Nasiim.	India, South Asian, immigrant.	Completed college in India and Canada.	No.
4. Mrs. Evans with daughter, Chantal.	Jamaica, Black immigrant.	Completed a two-year college program in Canada.	No.
5. Ms. Harris with niece, Jalisa.	Black, Canadian-born.	First attended a private medical college in Canada as a mature student. At the time of interview, was in the 3 rd year of university.	No (but will be first to get a high school diploma).
6. Mr. Jama with daughter, Sabia.	Somalia, Black, immigrant.	Completed High school in Somalia.	Yes.
7. Mr. Moore with Son, Kevin.	Guyana, Black, immigrant.	Completed college in Guyana and Canada.	No.
8. Mrs. Nguyen with daughter, Thuy.	Vietnam, East Asian, immigrant.	Completed elementary school in Vietnam.	Yes.
9. Mr. Oduro with Niece, Abi.	Ghana, Black, immigrant.	Completed University in Nigeria.	No.
10. Mr. and Mrs. Powell with daughter, Nova.	Jamaica, Black, immigrant.	Mr. and Mrs. Powell both completed college in Canada.	No.

Adult interviewed by student/child & pseudonyms used.	Adults' country of origin and ethnicity	Adults' highest level of education completed	Will the child be the first in the family to attend post-secondary schooling?
11. Mr. Sharma with Son, Pradeep.	India/Punjab, immigrant.	Completed college in India.	No.
12. Ms. Shaw with Daughter, Jenna.	Jamaica, Black, immigrant.	Completed college in Canada.	No.
13. Mrs. Walker with daughter, Kavita.	England, Black, immigrant.	Completed an undergraduate degree in Canada.	No.
14. Mrs. Watson with daughter, Kianna.	Jamaica, Black, immigrant.	Began nursing school in Jamaica and completed an undergraduate degree in Canada.	No.
15. Mr. and Mrs. Williams with daughter, Shanelle.	Guyana, Black, immigrant.	Both Parents completed high school in Canada. Mrs. Williams completed University to be an English teacher in Canada.	No.

Table Summary: All but one adult is a first-generation Canadian. There are 15 interviews and 17 adults in this table. 14 of 17 adults have some post-secondary education; most studied in their home countries prior to migrating to Canada.

The parent/child interviews began with open-ended questions where students asked their parents/caregivers to talk about their own childhood schooling experiences. The questions produced interesting conversations; many students expressed during the interviews that they did not know much about their parents' schooling or educational experiences before these interviews took place. Next, parents/caregivers were asked open-ended questions about Streetsview High, the students' school; questions about their expectations and aspirations for their children after high school; and questions about the community they live in. All the interviews were conducted

in the students' homes, and most were completed in the living room or at the kitchen table. The interviews lasted from 15 to 25 minutes on average, with two lasting 45–60 minutes and generating more extensive conversation. They sometimes took the form of a back-and-forth conversation between parents/caregivers and children.

In analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, I first read through them to note broad trends, majority answers, and divergent cases in the demographic data portion of the interviews. Later, consistent with thematic and critical discourse analysis, I did a close read to pay particular attention to themes or potential codes, and to gather quotes and examples for my analysis. In Chapter 5, I discuss three themes that emerged and then discuss each in depth.

Focus Groups

The decision to collect data through focus groups was made early, as part of the research design plan for the Sharing Experiences project. Students in the school participated in many focus groups over the two years of the study, of which four focus groups are included here. These took place in the same year as classroom observations and after the parent-child interviews. Since focus groups were already one of the data collection methodologies, it made sense to conduct group interviews with the same group of students who had interviewed their parents, two to four months after the interviews. As noted earlier, while many of the students' interviews were completed too late for inclusion in the data set for this dissertation, this was the same cohort of students who had earlier completed parent interviews. Guest et al. (2017) have written about the comparison of individual and group interviews for qualitative research, but the findings are mixed. What is clear from the literature is that focus groups and individual interviews are each a valuable source of data for qualitative research, but that individuals and groups talk differently, and that personal or sensitive information may be less likely to emerge in

a group discussion (Kruger et al., 2019). The use of both one-on-one interviews between children and parents, followed by focus groups in which information from the individual interviews was commented on by the students, helps ensure that data is representative of the thoughts and feelings of the participants. Focus groups were gendered with a same-gender facilitator; this decision is explained later in this section. Here is a table of the focus group participants:

Table of Focus Group Participants:

Focus Group and number of participants	Sex of participants	Pseudonyms and race/ethnicity as noted in facilitator's notes
A 6 participants	All young men, facilitated by a Black man graduate student.	Anthony (Black) Asif (South Asian) *Caleb (Black) Leo (Black) Pavan (South Asian) *Pradeep (South Asian)
B 6 participants	All young men, facilitated by a Black man graduate student.	Alex (Brown) Anil (South Asian) Arjun (South Asian) Jayden (mixed Black) Joshua (Black)
C 4 participants	All young women, facilitated by a Black woman graduate student.	Gabrielle (Black) Kim (East Asian) Leila (Black) Sana (East Asian)
D 6 participants	All young women, facilitated by Dani Kwan-Lafond.	*Anaya (South Asian) Kayla (Black) Marwa (Middle Eastern) Naya (South Asian) *Sabia (Black) *Sara (Black)

*Indicates students who also contributed written reflection and/or conducted a parent interviews.

The facilitators of the focus groups were racialized (Black, South Asian, and mixed-race non-White) graduate students between 20 and 30 years old who had friendly, outgoing personalities. All were trained graduate student researchers with some previous experience working with this project, so students were familiar with them as regular visitors to the school.²⁴ Most of the graduate student researchers also worked with youth in community organizations and/or were trained teachers. Therefore, they had a strong formal skillset as group facilitators, as well as familiarity and comfort interacting with youth. Hollander (2004) writes about the importance and benefits of choosing facilitators who share key characteristics with focus-group participants; I have mentioned age, and - given single-sex focus groups, sex-- and racialized identities (identifying as non-White) between participants and facilitators. I would add that heterosexual orientation was implied and accepted as the default by both students and graduate student researchers, none of whom openly identified as queer or non-binary. This is an important limitation to the research that I acknowledge, as such attitudes can erase and silence sexual diversity and difference. Hollander (2004), Robinson (2020), and Morgan (2002) all find that facilitators play a crucial role in shaping group dynamics and in prompting more group talk to happen; in the transcripts, all the facilitators are recorded using prompts as a way of helping to sustain the conversation with relevant commentary.

Facilitators began group discussions with a review of the confidentiality policies for this research, letting students know that their names and other identifying information would not be recorded but that the conversations would be transcribed and form part of the research data for

²⁴ In the context of the overall SSHRC-funded project, a small team of six graduate student researchers interacted with the students and teachers at the school many times. Activities not included in this dissertation include several workshops and graduate student panels held at the school and in classrooms; annual participation from students, teachers, and school administrators in an academic summer institute at York University; and a trip to York University for the Grade 12 students during which they were hosted in small groups on campus by the graduate student researchers, who acted as guides for the day.

the Conversations in Education project. The focus groups were consistently 90 minutes in length because they took place in the school during one class period. Groups were assigned classroom space and sat in chairs in a circle. Students were asked to put their phones away for the duration of the discussion and to engage as best they could. They were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that the focus groups were not a graded assessment. McNaughton and Myers (2004) suggest that focus groups are useful because “A group can provide prompts to talk, correcting or responding to others, and a plausible audience for that talk that is not just the researcher. So, focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives—but don’t” (p. 2). The topics we addressed with the students included: their communities, everyday lives, thoughts about the school, and plans and ideas about life beyond high school. As mentioned earlier, the research team, including the principal and other community members, considered it potentially beneficial, or at least useful, to facilitate these conversations to prompt considered reflection about educational aspirations.²⁵

The focus groups consisted of 3–6 students in same-sex groups. Robinson (2020) writes that social science researchers most commonly agree that 6–8 participants is the ideal size for a focus group. Whether the group should be homogenous or varied depends on the research setting, research questions, and other factors. While sex was not a primary focus of this research, it is an aspect of identity that shapes social interactions, family roles and responsibilities, and other aspects of life. Hollander (2004) wrote about conducting focus groups in which women participants later told her they had not felt comfortable sharing all their thoughts in front of some of their male coworkers²⁶. Hollander’s work is a reminder that “the social contexts of focus

²⁵ See Appendix D for the questions and prompts for focus groups.

²⁶ While all focus group participants were racialized, I must consider that some students may have felt similarly uncomfortable sharing some thoughts or ideas with members of groups different from their own, e.g. South Asian

groups—that is, the relationships among the participants and between the participants and the facilitator, as well as the larger social structures within which the discussion takes place—affect the data that are generated in ways that have not yet been widely acknowledged by focus group researchers” (Hollander, 2014, p. 604). When the classroom teacher suggested students may be more comfortable talking in same-sex groups,²⁷ the research team thought it made sense and might allow for gender-specific themes or shared experiences to come up. It is not unusual for focus groups to be homogenous in terms of gender, and it was felt that, at the very least, there was no risk or harm in taking this approach. The assigned facilitators were the same gender as the group.

While I do not have comparative data to show how a mixed-gender group might have changed or impacted what the participants had to say, gender is a relevant aspect of how peer relationships are formed in adolescence. Ample research in Canadian sociology discusses how gender impacts schooling experiences and outcomes, and more broadly, all aspects of social life (see Acker, 1987; Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2018; Craig et al., 2017; Crosnoe et al., 2008; James, 2019; Krahn et al., 2018; Serbin et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011b). Hollander (2004) points to the significance of ‘problematic silences,’ or the things that participants (women, in Hollander’s research) wanted to share but did not say because the presence of other members of the group made them uncomfortable. This idea of ‘silencing’ may also occur for non-normative or non-binary sex or gender identities in a heteronormative social context like the one at Streetsview High. If gender or sex-diverse students were in the room,

students may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences of race/racism/migration with Black students; First-generation students may not have felt comfortable sharing their experiences with Canadian-born peers, etc.

²⁷ No students in the class that we worked with identified as non-binary; all used ‘he/she’ pronouns.

there was no acknowledgement of this. Given this context, the research team followed the teacher's suggestion for same gender²⁸ focus groups²⁹.

Guest et al. (2017) ask how many focus groups are necessary in a qualitative research study to ensure that the most prevalent or important themes are discoverable. They found that more than 80% of all themes were discoverable within two to three focus groups, and 90% were discoverable within three to six focus groups. Three focus groups were also enough to identify all the most prevalent themes within the data set. (Guest et al., 2017, p. 3)

We conducted six focus groups using the questions and plan detailed in Appendix D, and two recordings were unusable; hence, four focus groups were included in the data. We found this data set to be consistent with what other scholars in the social sciences recommend (Guest et al., 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Written Reflections

Written reflections, 22 in total, from students are included in the data set for this dissertation. These were completed in the fall of 2012 and were on the topic "What Is Success." Students were instructed to write one page in class, and these were collected at the end of the period. I was in class for the completion of these written pieces. Students were then graded by their teacher on sentence structure and paragraph formation (but importantly, not on the content).

²⁸ This research did not interrogate presumed gender identities nor pay attention to potential sex differences, or the ways that students may have varied gender identities. This is a limitation of this study.

²⁹ The research team did not discuss organizing the focus groups into race-based groups (or other identity-based groups) because this was not requested or discussed with the school Principal and Teacher who were helping to organize the students. At the time we were interested in issues that had emerged in parent interviews around community relations, life in Brampton, parent-child discussions of schooling and education, and educational achievement and success. The teacher noted that the students socialized in mostly same-sex groups and recommended that same-sex groups would facilitate better, more open discussion on our topics of interest. Also, organizing by race or ethnicity would have left some groups unrepresented, as there were, for example, too few Vietnamese students to form a group.

The classroom teacher and I (as the research assistant in the class) emphasized that the students could write anything relevant, and that we were not looking for any specific answers. Still, it is important to note that this data collection activity was assessed by the teacher, and that this may have affected how students answered the questions. Here is a table listing the students' pseudonyms and race/ethnicity³⁰. Note that some participants contributed to more than one data set for this research.

Student Pseudonym	Sex	Race/ethnicity
*Anaya	female	South Asian
Ari	male	South Asian
Arya	female	South Asian
*Caleb	male	Black
Derek	male	Black
Divya	female	South Asian
*Gabrielle	female	Black
Gurleen	female	South Asian
*Jalisa	female	Black
Jaspreet	female	South Asian
Malika	female	South Asian
Meena	female	South Asian
Navjeet	male	South Asian
Nisha	female	South Asian
Priyanka	female	South Asian
Radha	female	South Asian
Rani	female	South Asian
*Sara	female	Black
Shani	female	Black
Sonia	female	Black
Tina	female	Black
Tracy	female	South Asian

³⁰ Note: The terms 'South Asian' and 'Black' are categories that do not capture the diversity of languages, religions, and countries of origin for the students' families. For example, South Asian students came from several distinct regions of India, as well as from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and represented Muslim, Sikh, and Christian groups. Collectively, they represented speakers of English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali, and Arabic and some told me in conversation (recorded in research notes) that their families were multilingual. Similarly, Black students were as diverse, with parents or grandparents from East Africa, West Africa (various specific countries), the West Indies, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

*Students whose data appear in more than area.

The methodology of using reflection essays to uncover themes salient to research questions is common in the sociological fields of medical and health education where researchers are using PAR and/or YPAR. This is likely because medical students often write reflective essays as part of their programs, making these a source of plentiful data for qualitative researchers. A preliminary literature review turned up many research articles from the field of medical education that analyzed reflective essays for thematic content (see House et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2021; Lackritz et al., 2018; Martinez & Lo, 2008; Schaub-de Jong et al., 2009). Other research analyzed undergraduate student essays in various education-focused fields (see Eder & Westwater, 2018; Hosein & Rao, 2017; Nind et al., 2020; Poldner et al., 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2004). There are also quantitative researchers who use reflection essays as a source of data (Brodahl and Hansen, 2014; Lebowitz, Kotani, and Matsuyama et al., 2020), but my commitment to qualitative research methods is in keeping with my theoretical approach, rooted in critical race theory. The decision to look at not only focus groups and interviews but also written reflection essays is in step with existing qualitative research best practices, although high-school student essays are an under-utilized and under-researched source of data, according to literature reviews conducted for this dissertation.

Field Notes

During the class, I kept a notebook with comments on what was going on, who was speaking, what the class lesson was about, or any specific happenings of note in the school. Every few weeks I cleaned up and review the notes, and these were discussed with Carl James and other research assistants, and the school Principal and teacher, at meetings. I wrote approximately one page of point-form notes per day spent in the class.

These notes were meant to improve my recall and to provide additional context for understanding the students' essays and parent interviews. I recorded that which most interested me in noting my impressions and interpretations, what Corwin and Clemens (2020) call "a selective and active process" (p. 410). That said, I believe there is good justification for including them in the data set for this dissertation and for re-examining them for contextual information in my analysis. Social scientists (Corwin & Clemens, 2020; Sanjek, 1990) point to the potential for field notes to improve the trustworthiness of data. There is a strong ethnographic tradition of field notes capturing participant observation data, and anthropologists have long made use of their personal field notes as the basis for research (Emerson et al., 2001; Shah, 2017). I am not doing ethnography or studying culture or cultural phenomena—nor did I document participant behaviours, nonetheless, borrowing the field note method is helpful for re-establishing context later and for reminding me of what I found most striking in and through my classroom participation, at the time. In this dissertation, I have approached the use of field notes to improve the richness of the data, and to triangulate students' talk about their futures, ideas about success, and other topics related to my research focus.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodologies I used to collect data for the 'Sharing Experiences' project in 2011-2012, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The research was conducted in a school setting, with students and their parents playing significant roles in the research. Research methodologies included semi-structured interviews with parents and children, focus groups, written reflections, and field notes.

The parent-student interviews were conducted in family homes by the students, lasting from 15 to 60 minutes. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically, and with attention paid

to absences and atypical responses. Focus groups were also an important part of the research design as they were conducted with the same cohort of students in the school who had interviewed their parents and completed written responses; tables in this chapter note those students whose responses appear in more than one data set. The focus groups consisted of 3–6 students in same-gender groups and were 90 minutes long. Written reflections were another significant source of data. The methodology of using reflection essays provided another way to capture students' thoughts and ideas. There are 22 written responses included in the data set. Field notes were written at the end of each day spent in the classroom. They provided additional context for understanding the students' essays and parent interviews. They are subjective, recording what the researcher deemed to be more interesting and relevant at the time, as well as their interpretations of what was happening in the classroom.

In conclusion, the chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the methods and methodologies used in the research, providing a foundation for the approach taken through critical discourse analysis to understand the data as a trustworthy and sincere reflection of what research participants wanted to express about their lives. The forthcoming three chapters take up the data analysis, returning to the ideas, frameworks and research questions laid out in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 4: Parent Data: ‘Go to University’

Introduction

This chapter focuses on what adults had to say to the children in their family homes about their community, their involvement in the school and in their children’s schooling and about their aspirations for their children’s educational futures. Drawing from 15 interviews conducted by the students with their adult family caregivers, this chapter sets the context for understanding upcoming student data in Chapter 5. As detailed in Chapter 3, 17 individual adults contributed to 15 interviews³¹ (because two interviews included a mother/father pair). Most of the adults were mothers and fathers to the students, and as previously noted, in two cases students interviewed their aunt and uncle³², respectively, who were adults they lived with fulltime and who were primary caregivers in their lives. Interviews were conducted in both November 2011 (Fall cohort, 7 interviews) and May 2012 (Winter/Spring cohort, 8 interviews). Data drawn from students, which will be presented Chapter 5, will show that the children in this study talked about success as being closely tied to the goal of achieving a university education. The transcript data presented here from the parents helps to situate what the students wrote and said about success, sacrifice, and their parents’ involvement in their education.

The parent interviews reveal three strong themes that provide insight into how these parents felt about the questions asked and related topics. The first theme examines the parents’ perceptions of the community they lived in; the second examines what parental involvement in

³¹ See chart on pp.69-70 in Chapter 3.

³² These adults are collectively referred to as ‘parents’ since they played a parenting role in the lives of the young people in the study. Students were instructed to interview their ‘parents’, and Jalisa and Abi, the two students who interviewed their aunt/uncle, explained to me that these were the adults most involved with, and knowledgeable about, their schooling and education.

education looked like for these families; and the third examines the parents' aspirations for their children. I begin with a summary of what the adults said to the children in the interviews about their own schooling experiences.

Context for Understanding the Parent Interview Data: Parents' Schooling and Educational Experiences

To contextualize the parental data, recall that the community the research participants lived in was, at the time of the research, a rapidly growing suburban area in Brampton, Ontario. The school was only in its fourth year of operation, and the area was a destination of choice for many recent and more established immigrant families with aspirations for a 'better life' and increased opportunities for their children, including the possibility of attending 'good schools.' To this end, for many parents and by extension their children, residing in the suburbs had come to represent a commitment to high educational achievement in an environment that would enable them to attain their goal of upward social mobility. According to James (2010), students' understandings of, and shared commitment to, their parents' expectations for them and their futures, and how they articulate narratives about their parents' sacrifices, can influence students' aspirations and how they act upon them. This is true too of perceptions of schooling and education as a viable means of attaining their own and their parents' aspirations for them (James, 2010). Thus, this data set of parental interviews offers a unique opportunity to better understand where students' ideas about education and success originated.

As detailed in the methodology chapter, I worked as a research assistant on the 'Sharing Experiences' research project, helping the students to learn how to conduct and record interviews with their parents in their homes. Interviews took place in the last month of each semester, after learning about the research project, completing focus groups, learning about interview

techniques, learning about qualitative and quantitative research, and practicing interview skills in class. It is worth noting that while this data was collected by students, they prepared the interview questions, which are found in Appendix B. A table of the parent interview participants (pseudonyms) is in Chapter 3 on pages 68 and 69. To prepare for analysis, the interviews were transcribed and coded for themes.

Background: Parents' Schooling Experiences.

One of the reasons that the parents' schooling experiences are discussed here is because there was strong student interest, expressed in class, in learning more about their parents' earlier life experiences. As noted in my research notes, many students were unsure about their parents' level of education (e.g., whether they had attended or completed college or university) and they knew very little about their parents' prior schooling experiences; a few told me that their parents rarely talked about what school was like for them³³. As a result, the first part of the interviews consisted of questions about the parents' past experiences. In class, many of the students told me they found it interesting to hear their parents' stories about school.

Parents were asked to tell their children about their elementary and high school experiences. All had attended elementary school. Referring to their early schooling experiences, all the parents said they were 'good' students in their youth, and they cited reasons such as: "because I always did my work on time," "because I got good grades," "because I never made trouble for no one," and "because I respected my teachers." Most parents said they had positive school experiences overall and positive memories of high school, and that they had good

³³ As a researcher, I found it surprising and curious to learn that so many of the parents in this study had not previously talked about their schooling or educational experiences in detail with their children. A few of the interviews reveal that the students were surprised, and interested, to learn about this aspect of their parents' lives for (what seemed like) the first time. Unfortunately, I did not collect data from parents about how/why/if they share their schooling stories with their children. The ways that first-generation parents talk about schooling in the home and with children, and what kinds of information they share, would be a worthy topic to explore in future research.

teachers when they were in school. Of the 15 interviews, two Guyanese parents (from separate families) talked about the close connection their schoolteachers had to their families or communities, explaining that “teachers were like your second parents,” “teachers always knew everything about everyone,” and “the teachers knew our families well”. Both Guyanese parents said that they kept in touch with their former teachers from Guyana, including a former primary school teacher who now lives in Toronto. This may be indicative of the close-knit nature of the Guyanese diasporic community and may also indicate that these parents have positive associations with, and perhaps expected, long-term, positive teacher-student-community relationships.

This group of mostly first-generation Canadian parents (16 of 17 individuals) spoke about the schooling contexts in which they grew up as being quite different from the Canadian system of education their children participated in. Six parents remarked on how Canadian schools’ approach to disciplining students is very different than ‘back home’, for instance, the use of dunce caps, locking students out of the school grounds if they arrive late, uniforms, a focus on discipline. For example, Mrs. Evans said:

Jamaican schools are much stricter. First of all, you got to wear uniforms. Everything was uniform, you had to, whereas Canadian schools, unless you're going to Catholic, you just wear whatever. And Jamaican schools, they're actually, their level of education is actually ahead of Canada, because certain things that you'd be learning in grade 9 is stuff that you've done in grade seven in Jamaica. It's way far advance than here, believe it or not, and harder, I think.

Mrs. Abdulali, another mother, said:

In the high schools in Canada they're very, very nice...in Somalia, if we do something bad, we get hit, in Somalia, they're very strict, they give a lot of homework, a lot of assignment every day.... here, it's not so hard, sometimes homework, sometimes no homework, Somalia's strict.

Abi interviewed her uncle Mr. Oduro, who offered the following observations about differences between schools in West Africa and Canada. He pointed to corporal punishment, structure, and access to technology as differences between Canada and Nigeria³⁴, where he completed University:

Mr. Oduro: Well, you know I went to school in Africa and in Africa they are actually allowed to hit you when you misbehave.

Abi: Oh damn.

Mr. Oduro: In Canada, that is not going to go on, so I really think that Canada is a nice environment for the student and it's just different, you know, in Africa the classrooms are just not very high tech [and do] not have a lot of technology.

For the students, these comments point to the experiences and understandings their parents have about some of the differences, including discipline but in some cases also higher academic standards in schools outside of Canada compared to Canadian schools.

In the same conversation between Abi and her uncle, just a few minutes later, the conversation turns to Streetsview. Mr. Oduro offers one of the few explicit critiques of the school present in the data, which is related to dress code and school rules:

Mr. Oduro: You know, I think, well, you definitely come to me with a lot of stories about the girls and them people in your school. And I think just people...here are different.

³⁴ Note that the student identified their family as Ghanaian, but that Mr. Oduro attended university in Nigeria.

Because in Africa, they're a bit more structure and you know, you have to act a certain way.

Abi: So, you feel that my school isn't structured enough?

Mr. Oduro: Yeah, I think that is how I am feeling.

Abi: What implications could you put in to make it more structure?

Mr. Oduro: Just dress code for [?] females and everything just to make [?] people act uh very good in society.

Mr. Oduro points to a dress code as something that would, in his view, improve the behaviour of young women in the school. While he offers this critique here, he also expresses a positive view of the school later in the conversation: "They [the school] do a good job because they call home whenever there's something wrong and they just stay up to date and communicate with the parents."

Four parents discussed corporal punishment and felt it was useful if it was not overused. One parent said, "I think here (in Canada) they would call it abuse, but in our day, it was just a tool for helping kids stay focused, and it worked." This difference in approach to school discipline is remarked on by several parents, and four parents laughed while saying that corporal punishment should be used in Canada. Many of the parents expressed views that valued stricter discipline than Streetsview, and Canadian schools in general, practiced; here is one intergenerational and cultural difference between how the children and their parents experienced schooling that might be informing how parents think about the pathways to success. If the parents' see strict discipline as having played a role in school achievement for them and their peers, it may be why they value this type of approach to discipline now.

A few (3) mentioned how they had had to pay for private schooling in their home countries and discussed the divide between public and private schooling ‘back home.’ Several parents (7) talked about how students in Canada lack respect for their teachers, for instance, suggesting that students too often talk back, don’t listen, and think they know everything; are spoiled, for instance, eating too much junk food, have access to too many gadgets and not enough supervision; and don’t read or write as well as they should. While the parents generally expressed ideas that positively valued more rigid schooling contexts, they also reflected on how schools in Canada are better equipped to offer high-quality education than ‘back home.’ Parents seem to value discipline and structure perhaps because it worked for them, but they also think Canadian schooling has more to offer their children because schools are publicly funded (and thus affordable), and provide adequate resources; new, safe, clean, quality infrastructure; adequate staffing; and other benefits, despite what they see as a tendency toward too little discipline.

How might the stories that these parents shared about their past schooling experiences be integrated into their children’s understandings of parental expectations and aspirations? Many of the students, as we will see in Chapter 5, emphasized that their parents cared especially about their grades, and were partial to fields of study that had, in their view, a high earning potential and that offered high social status. The student data will show that this cohort knows their family migration story has a lot to do with the hopes invested in their futures, and references the parents made about corporal punishment, as well as the comments about ‘good’ Canadian schools, with mention of school resources, teachers and infrastructure, are part of larger narratives about the many ways that these students lives are less difficult than what their parents experienced. Thus,

the themes of sacrifice and gratitude are salient in understanding why parents would prioritize their children's potential and the sacrifices it takes to invest in their children.

Theme 1: Parental Perception of Community: 'A Good Community'

The first theme that this chapter reports on is the parents' perceptions of the community in which they and their children lived. I will take up what parents said in parent-child interviews about the community, and to contextualize these responses, will consider the term 'multicultural' more closely, as a way to refer to a diversity of people and as a descriptor of a 'good' community. I will also discuss the ambivalence some Black parents in this group expressed about their sense of belonging in the community and their comments about what they perceived to be cultural dominance of one group over others in both the school and community.

Parents in this study overwhelmingly reported that they lived in a 'good' community. Some of the most common descriptors of the community were "multicultural," "clean," and "quiet." According to parents, there were few problems with "drugs," crime, or violence. Many parents were passionate and more talkative on the topic of their community than they were on the topic of schooling during the interviews.

Mr. Sharma, a father originally from India who was interviewed by his son Pradeep, said: "It's a nice neighbourhood. It's all multicultural people live here. I like it because everyone has their own freedom." It was interesting to note that many respondents mentioned 'multicultural' and/or 'diversity' as a key reason they considered Brampton to be a 'good' community. When Mr. Sharma says that "multicultural people" live in the community, he uses it as a stand-in for 'non-White' people, or for a diversity of people. I noted that parents made frequent use of the word 'multicultural' but in most of their interviews they did not talk about or name race or ethnicity explicitly. Most references to race, ethnicity, or a cultural group use other words

(multicultural, ‘one group’); in this sense, and as I wrote in the section on critical multiculturalism in Chapter 1, multicultural discourse can be a way of talking around race and avoiding direct reference to race, while also celebrating ‘diversity’.

I do not see any evidence that participants employed the term to refer to multiculturalism as a social policy, even though there is an official Multiculturalism Act in Canada; it was used as a term that refers to race, ethnicity and to diversity, and it always used in a positive sense. For example, in the conversation with their daughter Shanelle, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who are Black immigrants from Guyana, mention that their community is “multicultural”, “safe” and “good” in their conversation about the community:

Shanelle: Do you think we live in a good community? Why?

Mrs. Williams: Yes, we do live in a good community.

Mr. Williams: It's a very mixed, multicultural community.

Mrs. Williams: Yes, and which is important for everyone. And it's safe.

While these comments about multicultural Brampton are positive, another parent, Ms. Harris contrasts her recollections of living in ‘multicultural’ Toronto with her perception of Brampton, where she now lives, as being less multicultural³⁵.

I think the one thing I miss about Toronto is Toronto is very multicultural, you see everybody talking to each other, well in the sense that people interact with each other, like they're more open and more talkative and people here seem to be a bit more reserved.

³⁵ This quote is used again in a later section of this Chapter, where Ms. Harris’s statement is considered alongside statements made by other Black adults in this study. Here, the focus is on the use of the term ‘multicultural’.

Through these observations, Ms. Harris argues, in contrast to many other parents, that there is cultural homogeneity in Brampton and that there is not much communication across neighbours of different races and ethnicities. Interestingly, Ms. Harris evokes multiculturalism, but she is not euphemistic about race, instead arguing for neighbourliness “regardless of race and ethnicity.” Such meaningful multiculturalism, across racial and ethnic lines, would be a community strength, but as Ms. Harris expresses, such interracial communication and solidarity is currently lacking in Brampton. This contrasted with many other parents, who invoked social harmony in comments like ‘everyone gets along, everyone is friendly.’

It is interesting to note that while Ms. Harris’s statement is critical of some aspects of social life Brampton, earlier in her interview she offered a different comparative evaluation with Toronto and suggested that Brampton is “...a lot better than where we lived in Toronto”. As discussed in Chapter 1 in the section about Brampton, suburbs often represent upward social mobility, and this could mean that Brampton is comparatively better than Toronto, but it has other challenges, such as the social relations issues discussed in the previous section.

Many of the parents’ comments refer to an individual- or family-level sense of privacy and safety. These features of the suburban context contrast to some high-density urban environments, often characterized by noise, high traffic, and a lot of action. Parents seemed glad these features that they associated with cities were not part of the landscape in Brampton. Everyday interactions with others were described as featuring a kind of polite social distance, where ‘people are friendly’ but people ‘keep to themselves.’ For example, while still positively depicting their neighbourhood, two people said that they didn’t know their neighbours, and that this was a good thing. One parent stated: “We have privacy here; everyone keeps to themselves.”

Another said: “Here everyone is quiet, they like to talk to themselves, and it’s nice houses.”

Thuy, translating from Vietnamese for her mother, Mrs. Nguyen, shared a similar viewpoint:

My mom thinks that we do live in a good community because there is no one bothering us, and everyone keeps to themselves. It’s very quiet and there is nobody bombarding us and there is no drama, and she feels safe living in this community.

The values of privacy, personal space, and calm are features associated with middle-class, suburban communities, precisely like the ones these families lived in. The parents’ comments generally reflected a sense of satisfaction with their choice of community when it came to housing and the look of the neighbourhood. As I observed, the community was indeed clean, new, and quiet, and so it makes sense that parents were pleased with what they saw around them insofar as they valued these characteristics in the neighbourhood.

The parents also associated the idea of a ‘good’ community with the newness of the infrastructure (e.g., homes) in the neighbourhood. At the time of the research, the neighbourhood around the school was very new, with a lot of ongoing construction. Some of the streets near the school had still not acquired official street signs or names.

When asked about any problems in the community, most parents had few comments or said they did not think there were problems or didn’t know of any. Others had concerns about intergroup relations in Brampton, already raised by Ms. Harris and which will be discussed later in this Chapter in the context of other parents’ remarks. For the parents who had little to say about community problems, comments like Mrs. Evans’s were representative:

I don’t know if anything goes on or not, I just do my own thing mind my own business so um, so far, we’ve been here for what, two years and I don’t see anything so I’m assuming, no.

Mrs. Williams felt similarly, but her response was met with a rebuttal by her daughter Shanelle.

For context, the conversation before this segment mentioned “drugs and crime”:

Mrs. Williams: We don’t have that [community problems, drugs, crime], we don’t have that in our community here.

Shanelle: Yes, we do, why do you think I called every day? [Laughter]

Mrs. Williams: Well, what can we say about that? So long as you guys are not in it, that’s fine, whoever is in it, will have to figure that one out.

When pressed, Mrs. Williams recognized that community problems may exist, but as long as her children were not involved, they did not concern her much. Overall, all the parents expressed satisfaction and a sense of safety in the community. It was on the issue of community problems that the students’ and parents’ views showed most divergence. In focus groups and in informal conversations in the classroom (recorded in research notes), many students, especially the young men, talked about peer conflict, youth criminality, and issues of community safety, while parents’ comments did not reflect any similar concerns. The parents’ silence on the issues of safety may reflect their lack of awareness, but it may also indicate an unwillingness to delve into potential problems. Maintaining a view of the community that is positive may allow parents reaffirm their decision to live in Brampton, having moved from ‘conflict-ridden’ Toronto. Some of the students’ comments on this topic will be taken up in Chapter 5.

Inter-ethnic Relations in the Community

Black parents made comments about inter-ethnic relations that are worth noting because they were distinct from observations by other parents. Black parents were overrepresented in the interview sample, with 12 Black parents taking part in the 15 interviews; some were in pairs (see Chapter 3, p. 67-68), and they were a diverse group, with origins in Ethiopia, Ghana, Guyana,

Jamaica, and Somalia. In particular, several of the Black parents spoke about the cultural dominance of other racialized groups in the community, and they expressed fewer positive opinions about the intergroup relations and sociocultural dynamics of the neighbourhood than other racialized parents did. It is notable that the comments from Black parents were also from first-language English speakers; I think this is relevant to some of the comments discussed below that refer to cultural adaptation for South Asian community members, who were often second-language English speakers.

For example, Ms. Harris, an aunt and caregiver, contrasted Brampton with Toronto, saying she missed the ‘multicultural’ make-up of Toronto. As noted earlier, some parents used the term ‘multicultural’ as stand-in for talking about race, but Ms. Harris clearly and explicitly references race and ethnicity:

In our neighbourhood, everyone keeps to themselves, and I think it would be a better place if everyone was more open to talking to other people, regardless of race and ethnicity and whatever their background is. I think we're all neighbours, we should all be able to say hi to each other and communicate more, and I think that would make our community stronger.

Previously, we encountered the above quote from Ms. Harris, in which she portrays cultural diversity as a desirable trait that characterized her community in Toronto. However, she expressed her belief that Brampton's community contradicts this notion. Many of the Black parents in these interviews made regretful comments about not feeling much community cohesion, nor a strong sense of affinity with others, and some pointed to aspects of cultural dominance by South Asians as part of what they perceived to be a problem.

Five of the Black respondents commented on the lack of diversity in the community and on what they perceive as the dominance of South Asian people or cultures in the school and community. One of these parents said that the community was dominated by “Indians who think they own the place.” During her interview, Mrs. Powell said to her daughter Nova: “I don’t think your school is that diverse enough and um, they need to listen to what the students—all ethnic people in the school—not just one!”, so expressing frustration and a feeling of being unheard within the school system.

Another sentiment that emerged in some of the Black parents’ comments is the idea that some community members (‘Indians’) do not ‘adapt’ to Canadian culture, which the Black parents saw as a problem and a factor preventing more social contact and community cohesiveness. For example, in this conversation between Nova and her parents Mr. Powell and Mrs. Powell, they point to a language barrier for some community members, and to their perception that “Indians don’t want to adapt.” They also make the distinction that they are referring to the local community, not to the entirety of Brampton. This comment may mean they are thinking about the school, which has a majority South Asian population, and/or the immediate neighbourhood.

Earlier in their interview, Mr. and Mrs. Powell shared positive commentary about their choice of community and the nice, safe, and clean neighbourhood they live in. Despite the earlier positive comments, they also had this to say about community problems:

Nova: So, problems or challenges in our community and what are they...

Mrs. Powell: Um, language barrier.

Nova: Why?

Mrs. Powell: Because we have, can I say Indians?

Nova: Yeah!

Mrs. Powell: We have a...

Mr. Powell: Not just Indians, it's all culture, that does not want to adapt, a lot of the elderly ones.

Mrs. Powell: You're talking about our community?

Mr. Powell: Yeah.

Mrs. Powell: Our community, we're not talking about the whole of Brampton.

Mr. Powell: You gotta be able to adapt.

Mrs. Powell: Yes, if you live in Canada, you have to be able to.

Mr. Powell: There's going to be challenges. Instead of the City of Brampton adapting to them, they should adapt to the city of Brampton.

Mrs. Powell: Correct.

Mr. Powell: People should adapt to their environment, instead of the environment adapting to them.

Mrs. Powell: True.

Mr. Powell: Once you choose to go into a new environment or a new culture, you should embrace that culture too, I'm not saying you should give up your culture, but you gotta embrace the other person's culture, instead of getting the other person over to adapt to your culture.

Mrs. Powell: I agree.

There are contradictions raised in this conversation: Mr. Powell says he is in favour of people maintaining their culture, yet he feels some groups are not "adapting" to the culture in Brampton.

Mr. Powell showed some hesitancy when he said, "Because we have, can I say Indians?"; it is

unclear if this is a lack of facility around talk of race/ethnicity, or if this is about terminology (e.g. Indian/South Asian). He speaks of the need for people to “adapt to their environment” and not the other way around. These parents feel that the City of Brampton was more accommodating to, and/or dominated by, South Asians, but in presenting Brampton as homogenous they are not acknowledging that this is a diverse group that includes many Punjabi/Sikh Indians, as well as Muslim, Christian, or Hindu practicing South Asians from different countries of origin.

Further, Mr. Powell’s comment that “people should adapt to their environment” points to the community and individual-level effort required to conform to a new cultural and/or linguistic environment. The focus on individual adaptation also leaves unmentioned the structures, policies, or institutions that shape social environments. At the same time, they also say that people should not give up their culture, and that embracing others’ cultures is important. There is some ambivalence here; they express a desire for more connected social lives and a sense of community cohesion, and they acknowledge the importance and value of culture, while they also express some dissatisfaction with what they perceive as the cultural dominance of South Asian communities in Brampton.

The cohort of parents who contributed to the interviews was small, and South Asian parents were underrepresented in this data set compared to Black parents. As I explained in methodology section (Chapter 3), some students did not complete their assigned recordings on time for inclusion. In future research, it would be important to consider, more fulsomely, how South Asian adults in the community experience life in Brampton, since their position as the dominant racialized group impacts the types of interactions and interethnic relations that Black parents are referring to in their comments.

Black people are the second most common visible minority group in Peel, but at 15.9% of the population (Sen, 2012), they are a much smaller demographic than South Asians, who make up 48.6% of people in Brampton (Sen, 2012). The sentiments expressed by these Black parents reveal that they do not feel adequately represented, or perhaps not fully included, in some of the school and community happenings. When Mrs. Powell says that it is important to favour a range of communities, “not just one,” where the ‘one’ racialized group she is likely referring to is the largest in the school and community, South Asian, she suggests that her own and other communities are less included. Another parent, Mrs. Shaw, in conversation with her daughter Jenna, says something similar to Mrs. Powell, referring to the community rather than the school:

Jenna: Okay. You think there are any problems or challenges in our community?

Mrs. Shaw: Cultural.

Jenna: What is that?

Mrs. Shaw: Because 95% in this neighborhood are from one particular kind of culture and they’re very stand-offish.

Both Mrs. Powell and Mrs. Shaw’s comments point to feelings of exclusion or marginalization for these Black parents. They also suggest negative attitudinal or behavioral perceptions of South Asians (“they think they own the place” and “they’re stand-offish”). There is a more than a hint here of having had poor interactions, but due to the lack of follow-up questions from student interviewers, it is difficult to know exactly which parts of school or community life contributed to these feelings, or why they feel this way. Of consequence here is that their comments clearly point to a perceived or real social distance between South Asian and some Black communities in Brampton.

In this conversation, Mrs. Walker and her daughter Kavita talk about the social distance between different groups in the community as “self-segregation”:

Mrs. Walker: I think that even though you don't see ‘in your face’ prejudice still exists, I find that people are more, there's a lot of self-segregation going on and that's between different colours, but even within our own community and with the Indian community, there's a lot of self-segregation going on.

Kavita: Yeah?

Mrs. Walker: Yeah, which is not healthy.

Kavita: So, you think we should all become one big happy family?

Mrs. Walker: There's no such thing as one big happy family, but I think it would be, it would be good if we learned not to be so afraid of each other and learned to get to know each other and demystify all of those myths that are out there and see each other as human being first and the colour and the religion and all that kind of stuff it's just baggage right?

There are elements in this conversation that refer to race (“different colours”) and some that refer to ethnicity (“our own community” and “the Indian community”). When Mrs. Walker talks about “demystifying myths” and learning “not to be so afraid of each other,” it calls to mind anti-Black racial stereotypes that are ubiquitous in Canada, due to the history and presence of anti-Blackness in the settler colony and beyond. Mrs. Walker's comment does not specify that she is referring to anti-Black stereotypes, but as a Black person, she is almost certainly aware of these ideas, so it's feasible that this is what she is thinking about when she says, “...see each other as human being first.” It is important to consider these comments in the context of anti-Black racism—especially because the lack of inter-cultural or inter-ethnic community integration and

the social distance that these parents are referring to seems unwanted (“not healthy”). At the same time, Mrs. Walker remarks express a humanist impulse to challenge all stereotypes and “see each other as a human being first”.

Taken together, the parents’ and students’ comments about the community shed light on how race relations, racial hierarchies, group privilege, and power play out in interpersonal interactions in the school and community, with (in some of the parents’ views) South Asians positioned as privileged relative to Black communities in Brampton. These comments are consistent with the issues and challenges raised in a report from the Ontario Government about Peel District School Board (PDSB) (Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S., 2019) and in reports and directives from PDSB (Dey & Logan, 2022; Strangway, L., 2021), which in recent years have called attention to anti-Black racism in the community and in schools. In fact, the Black Community Action Network (BCAN) in Peel arose because anti-Black racism and the wellbeing of Black people in Peel is a community concern. The BCAN has a mandate to advance equity and anti-racism initiatives in the region and has contributed to several policy papers and to academic research on issues of equity for Black people in Peel regions (Black Community Action Network Peel, 2021). While these reports were only published in recent years, the problems they address have been of concern to the community for decades, as the authors of a 2019 report clearly state when they write: “The only difference between now and thirty years ago is that we, and the PDSB, have access to data supporting the concerns and illustrating the crisis of anti-Black racism within the Board (Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S., 2019, p.8).” In this context, the details and nuances and specifics of how racial dynamics impact the families who contributed to this research are important.

**Theme 2: The School and Parents' Involvement in their Children's Schooling:
'They'll Call Us If Anything Is Wrong.'**

The next theme in this Chapter relates to what parents said about their involvement in their children's schooling and education. Early in the research project, teachers and school administrators expressed some concern about what some in the school perceived as low engagement by many parents. As I will detail in discussion of this theme, I found that these parents took a 'they'll call us if anything is wrong' approach to dealing with their children's high school education. The parents' involvement with the school was characterized by minimal engagement with school authorities but a high degree of trust in the school and in teachers, as well as a strong sense of involvement in their children's education overall (just not directly with the school).

Almost every parent expressed a very high level of respect and satisfaction with their child's specific high school (Streetsview High) and enthusiastically said they thought it was a good school. Their reasons included: because it was newly built, clean, and well-organized; because it had good teachers and did a good job of keeping track of the students; and because it offered good programs/subjects. For example, Mr. Moore, who was born and raised in Guyana, said this about why it was a good school:

I go by every day. So, from the outside it looks very good. I like the running track at the back, it looks very nice. Even if it rains you are not gonna get messy there. The parking lot is big. It looks like a new modern school, so I think it's good. It's close to our home.

Another parent Ms. Shaw, said:

One of the main reasons I really do like your school is the teachers they are nice to talk with, they are very respectful, the ones that I spoke with... I like when you guys go to

school late, they always call me to inform me, to let me know if you guys reach your classes late or you're late for school, which is very nice of them. I appreciate it a lot, so I can find out what you guys are doing and the reason why you're late! They are caring, which is a form of good responsibility.

A few parents (6) reflected a general assumption that Streetsview High was a good school but also some uncertainty or lack of confidence about the school. Comments included: "I don't know, it's good," "How would I know about your school? I assume it's fine, I never hear anything bad," and "I only know what you tell me." The comments reflect a lack of familiarity, but also that they rely on what the students tell them about the school; in other words, their children are their main point of contact to the school, and they do not rely on the school directly for information about their individual, other than daily notifications of absences and regular reporting of grades.

One parent commented that they wished the school would send home more information about events and happenings, instead of relying on parents to seek out the information themselves online:

I know there's information on the website, but I like the old style of getting the news on paper. Like whatever is going on. I'm sure there's tons of other stuff that's going on that I don't know about and I don't go on the internet as often as I can, so maybe a newsletter can still come home. . . and . . . it doesn't have to be every month, but like a flash or timetable of what's going to come up in the next three months. Like on a three month basis. Quarterly.

This parent showed a desire for a more accessible form of communication, putting forward a concrete suggestion for how the school might communicate more proactively with parents rather than expecting parents to look online for information about school activities.

Most parents' comments revealed unfamiliarity with the school, both as a physical space and as an educational institution. None of the parents brought up specific programs, activities, or classes at the school, though the screens inside the school offered information about these kinds of happenings. As noted in Chapter 3, some interviews were only 15 minutes long, so it is plausible that brevity of the conversation was another reason parents did not mention additional information. A few of the parents mentioned the principal in positive terms, though not by name and with no anecdote or incident included (e.g., "The principal is good, she is doing a good job"). Despite the lack of specificity, parents were in general very enthusiastic about Streetsview as a 'good school.'

Most of the parents felt that the school was doing an excellent job of keeping them informed about their children's progress and daily attendance. The number of phone messages from the school resulted in many jokes about too many phone calls, but in general, it seemed to be an administrative school practice that the parents liked, as evidenced in the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who are immigrants from Guyana, and their daughter Shanelle:

Mrs. Williams: They do a very good job at updating the parents of everything that goes on.

Shanelle: Is there anything you wish they did differently?

Mrs. Williams: No. If they have anything they need to add, that will be surely appreciated but that's okay.

Shanelle: What about the lates?

Mrs. Williams: The lates, no, don't stop calling for the lates.

Also expressing satisfaction with the call system the school had in place, Aunt Helen said, “They call everyday whenever there is an event or an upcoming event or anything, they call and leave an automated voicemail, anytime if you're late, I get a call, so I'm pretty well aware and I like it that way.” As per my in-person conversations with the students, recorded in field notes, some parents were aware that students might try to intercept school messages, or that their children may deliberately omit information that comes from the school. Some students in focus groups admitted that they sometimes attempted to intercept or omit messages and information from the school to their parents, as is documented in Chapter 5.

Despite their relatively limited contact with the school, parents reported being very involved in their children’s education. This is consistent with the findings on student data that will be presented in Chapter 5, showing that students perceived their parents to be very involved in their overall educational journeys, but not very involved in the happenings of their school. Data from parents demonstrate that their ideas about what constitutes involvement differed from the school’s; parents tended to go to parent-teacher nights or to contact the school only if they thought their child was underperforming academically. “If they have a concern they’ll call me”, said Mrs. Watson. In discussing their concerns about parental involvement, administrators and teachers cited low attendance at school/parent meetings, lack of participation in school activities, ‘inadequate’ or no responses to communication sent home, and little to no involvement in parent councils as what they saw as evidence of under-involvement by parents. Yet parents and students both felt that the parents were highly involved in their children’s education. How might we conceive of parental involvement for these families, from the parents’ perspective?

Parental Involvement Among Respondents

The ways that the parents described their roles in supporting and encouraging, or setting clear expectations for their children's educational success were not reflected in the school administration's notions of parental engagement. The Peel District School Board's 'parent' web page in 2012 was nearly singularly focused on parents volunteering in schools, although they also included suggestions for academic enrichment in the home. The school board's specific suggestions for how parents could be more involved included: "Attending the Peel board's 'Make a difference in literacy and beyond parent conference³⁶, 'volunteering³⁷ for your child's school and reading to your child at night." Several paragraphs were devoted to the benefits of parental involvement in children's education (framed through volunteerism), as well as details and examples of volunteer opportunities (Peel District School Board, 2009).

Census data and focus group data, as well as notes made during in-class observations, point to most of the families in this study having some degree of financial stress, language barriers, or work and family obligations that would prevent them from being able to volunteer in the school. These parents tended to work jobs with little flexibility.³⁸ They also did not seem to see a need to attend events at the school in person, since they trusted the school and were following their children's progress at home, as evidenced in the quotes presented earlier in this Chapter when children talked about feeling satisfied with how the school kept them informed. Their engagement with schooling and education was rather pragmatic, with a strong focus on

³⁶ A one-day annual conference for parents, held on a Saturday.

³⁷ As list of example volunteer opportunities for secondary school parents is listed on the 2009 Peel District School Board website: "Speaking to students on Career Day or at Job Fairs; assisting in the library or office; membership on school council or attendance at school council meetings; welcoming new families, providing help with translation/interpretation; helping with the school's environmental program, e.g. garden planting or recycling." (Peel District School Board, 2009).

³⁸ As reported by students in focus groups and written assignments, and as recorded in field notes based on conversations with teachers and the school principal.

academics. The transcript data showed few to no comments from parents about extracurricular activities, social clubs, or other aspects of school life that their children may be involved in. It may be that events at the school not directly related to academics or to post-secondary pathways were of little interest to this group of parents; this was the view expressed by their children, as will be explained in Chapter 5.

Many parents did not express any dissatisfaction with this ‘hands-off’ relationship with their children’s school. As the previous section of this Chapter noted, they seemed satisfied with minimal direct communication with the teachers or school authorities, expecting only to be notified if something went wrong. Here is another example of this sentiment, as expressed by Cheryl in her interview with daughter Chantal:

Chantal: Do you think that the school does a good job of keeping you up to date about how I'm doing?

Cheryl: I think so. Um because I always see the number calling my house. So, I'm assuming yes. And I know if teachers. What I like is if teachers have any major issues, they will call me and let me know.

This family conversation, between Mrs. Williams and Mr. Williams and their daughter Shanelle, is a good example of those parents who see no reason to go to the school unless there is a problem:

Mrs. Williams: I only went to your school one time because there wasn't any reason for me to go. The report card is good and everything is good.

Shanelle: Why did you go? To swipe me out right?

Mrs. Williams: To sign you in and sign you out.

Mr. Williams: I never went to your school.

While Mr. Williams emphasized that he “never went” to the school, most of the parents said they had been to the school more than once, though none reported regular visits. This is not surprising: Streetsview is a high school, so the children are adolescents, and many of them can get themselves to and from school. Recall that in Chapter four, students discussed their desire for their school lives to remain separate from their home/family lives. Of the parents who had come to the school, some had come for an event (e.g., concert) or for parent-teacher interviews. Two fathers specifically noted that they have occasionally stopped by unannounced at lunch times to see who their daughters were hanging out with and what they were doing. Two of the mothers said they had come when their sons were in trouble (a fight/conflict). Some counted ‘dropping off or picking up my child’ as a visit to the school and commented that even these brief interactions allowed them to get a sense of what the school is like. For example, Mr. Abebe had only been to the school a few times but felt positively about it. He said to his daughter Halima: “Your school, I was there, two or three times, it’s a good school. The setup is good, environment is good.”

None of the parents had been to the school more than a few times, and none seemed to regret this, or feel as though they were missing the information they most wanted (updates on their children’s grades, and communication if their child was late or absent from school). This is typical for parents of adolescent children in high school; what is notable is that the perceived under-involvement of parents, and a desire to understand it better, was the catalyst for the original SSHRC-funded research project between the school and the York Centre for Education and Community. While conversations about curricular content are often highly politicized in media and social contexts, these parents did not say much, if anything, about what their children

were learning³⁹, at least in the brief interviews that are the source of my analysis here. They were neither critical of, nor did they show any specific interest in, the curriculum their children were studying. Rather, they were focused on grades as the main indicators of their children's success. If their children's grades met their expectations, they did not see any other compelling reason to visit the school or to seek out communication with teachers or staff there. Recall Mrs. Williams earlier comment on this point: "I only went to your school one time because there wasn't any reason for me to go. The report card is good and everything is good." Keeping in mind that Streetsview is a high school, it is perhaps not unusual for parents of adolescents to have minimal contact with the school; what is of note is the parents' rationale and their generally positive view of the school, which emerged consistently in the data.

While it may not have fit the school board's framing of parental involvement, these parents (as per discussion of the previous theme) were extremely focused on their children's educational attainments. However, interest in typical notions of parental involvement through volunteerism and participation in school governance (e.g., parent committees) was not shared by the parents in this study; the implications of this incongruity will be discussed in the final Chapter of this dissertation.

Theme 3: Parental Aspirations for their Children: Fulfilling the 'Immigrant Bargain.'

The parents were committed to their children's success and considered education a primary goal for the whole family. For these parents, educational attainment was inseparable from the notion of success. Every parent said they wanted their children to continue their studies

³⁹ Parents were asked about the school and the children's education in broad terms, and there were no direct questions about curricula, pedagogy or other aspects of what students were learning in school.

in college or university, and they hoped that Streetsview High was preparing them for that transition. They considered ‘a good education’ an important achievement and often spoke about its value to their children. Mrs. Evans put it succinctly:

I expect you to get a job after high school. I expect you go to university. I expect you to finish well. And I expect you to make your ambition to be somebody, right. So, I do expect you to exceed.

Most parents expressed a preference for university over college, and many parents had specific programs in mind, especially engineering, law school, or something in the medical field. The following excerpt between Shanelle and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, immigrants from Guyana, is a good example of this kind of conversation:

Mrs. Williams: I expect you to do good so you can get into a good university.

Mr. Williams: Same thing.

Shanelle: Dad, add on more.

Mr. Williams: I expect you to have good marks.

Mrs. Williams: So you could take you into university.

Mr. Williams: So you can go to university or college.

Mrs. Williams: Not college. University.

Mr. Williams: I want you to be a lawyer.

The above dialogue reads as a negotiation between the parents, with Mr. Williams seeming a little more open to college than his wife. Another parent, Mr. Sharma, told his son Pradeep what he wants to see him achieve:

Mr. Sharma: The highest education, higher marks, so you can go to university or college.

Pradeep: What do you hope I do right after high school?

Mr. Sharma: Do better than me,

Pradeep: Go to university?

Mr. Sharma: Go to university.

Parents frequently linked a university education to getting a ‘good’ job. Data from students in the next Chapter will show that the children, like Pradeep, echo this association between a degree and a ‘good’ job. Mrs. Batra gave a concise version of her expectations to her son Nasiim: “Go to university, that’s what I want [for you]! Yeah, and get good grades and that’s it. Then find a good job.” This reflects much of what parents had to say about educational success. Success was conventionally oriented around a university education, job acquisition, and, as we will see later, family life.

Many parents also mentioned that their children’s post-secondary choices should also consider their interests, talents and abilities. While many parents expressed preferences for careers they perceived as high-paying and high status, many also expressed that their children’s interests mattered. For example, Mr. Abebe, speaking about her potential program of study, says to his daughter Halima:

This is, I leave it for you. It is your interest. Even though that, um, also you have to consider your future, how you want to use it, the markets and availability, even though you have interests, you can use it, interest to a certain degree, but you have to consider your future also, you have to work, you have to support yourself, your family when you establish your family.

During his interview with daughter Halima, Mr. Abebe revealed that his post-secondary schooling in Ethiopia, where he studied architectural design, was disrupted due to political

conflict. He considers Halima's choice an important factor in decision-making, but also offers pragmatic advice on other factors she should consider in making her decision, including the need to find a job "you have to work, you have to support yourself" and the need to support a family, which Mr. Abebe appeared to take as a given.

As to what constitutes a 'good' job, Mr. William's earlier comment about becoming a lawyer echoes a common refrain that many of the students spoke about in focus groups: these mostly first-generation parents (recall that 16 of 17 parents were foreign-born) wanted their children to become educated professionals, and in particular, the specific professions of doctor, lawyer, or engineer were often encouraged. These are careers that offer stability, another important aspect a successful adulthood. Thuy, whose mother Mrs. Nguyen, speaks in Vietnamese, translated during the interviews: "My mom hopes for me to finish university, hopefully finish four years of it and then possibly apply to law school." Mrs. Watson, who completed nursing school in Jamaica and university in Canada, focused on the link between university education, jobs, and a comfortable life for her daughter: "Maybe something with the government. A good paying job. Something that will help you live comfortable in the future." 'Good jobs,' 'good pay,' 'financial success,' and 'supporting oneself' were phrases that were often mentioned when parents were asked to speak about the goal of post-secondary schooling for their children. These careers provide stability for their children, and this was an important theme in how parents envisioned their children's successful futures.

The parents' focus on a university education and professional studies is not surprising. There are good reasons why parents may show a strong preference for university over college for their children. The first is that these parents held high aspirations for their children; achieving these goals requires university-level study. University study also offers pathways to the more

clearly defined professional careers that parents and Canadian society more generally, understand to be prestigious, stable, and financially well compensated. Parents perhaps preferred these programs because these were what they knew. ‘Doctor’ and ‘lawyer’ are quintessential examples of professional careers. Less well-known professions (e.g., physician’s assistant, educational developer, program analyst, landscape architect) or fields of study not linked to specific jobs (e.g., history, sociology, linguistics, political science) were perhaps less desirable because of their unfamiliarity and because of the families’ overarching focus on upwardly mobile jobs/careers. This majority of this group of parents did not attend university in Canada and were therefore less likely to have been exposed to the wide range of programs that are offered. Thus, they strongly encouraged their children to pursue university studies that led to careers they recognized and valued, and that they perceived to be stable and financially rewarding.

This focused approach, however, has potential risk. Research shows that a push to attend university over college can be problematic if students are not well-suited to independent study, reading, and other skills that academic success in university requires. “Despite these realities,” writes Coates (2014), a Canadian professor and Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation, in a CBC News story:

parents, guidance counsellors and politicians continue to over-promote universities, leaving the impression across the country that universities offer the only realistic and reliable paths to middle-class job security and a productive and rewarding career. This is a serious misunderstanding, one that is not connected to the realities of the Canadian job market and the nature of work in the 21st century.

Other studies have confirmed that university graduates in Canada do earn more on average than those without a degree (Finnie et al., 2014), but that it is important to look at this data with gender in mind – Statistics Canada (2017c) found that while women with Bachelor’s degrees earned approximately 40% more on average than did women with college diplomas, men with apprenticeship certificates earned only 11% less than men with a Bachelor’s degree, a considerably smaller gap than for women. Men with apprenticeship certificates also earned 7% more than men with college diploma, and that wages in this category showed the fastest growth over a decade (2005-2015) (Statistics Canada, 2017c).

This study did not aim to determine whether these students were well-suited for university-level study, but data suggest that in Ontario and in Canada, only 80% and 72% of university entrants, respectively, complete their programs; this means roughly 25–30% of students change programs, change post-secondary pathways, or leave school altogether (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2008). Given the parameters of this study, it is not possible to know if this cohort of students completed, or were even accepted into, their parents’ and/or their desired programs of study. What is clear is that their perception of their options, which strongly favoured professional careers beginning in university, were not as broad as the range of programs and areas of study available to them in Canada. Given the very high expectations these young people were raised to meet, this increases the risk that not completing university could be perceived very negatively by the students and their families.

The Role of the Immigrant Bargain

The ‘immigrant bargain’ (Louie, 2004) is a concept that is tied to the ‘sacrifice narrative’ as explained in Chapter 1 and employed in the analysis of student data in the next Chapter. As discussed in Chapter 1, the narratives of the immigrant bargain and parental sacrifice can have a

motivating effect on children's drive to succeed. The immigrant bargain narrative emphasizes people (parents, in this case) leaving home countries to start life elsewhere in pursuit of a life where children have a good chance at attaining a university education, which is associated with a high-paying professional job, a family, and secure housing. These hardships can later be successfully redeemed by their children through upward social mobility. The 'plot' of the story "takes the form of a family project of mobility that transports a strong sense of purpose to take up the parents' story and bring it to a successful end in terms of high education and a good job" (Legewie, 2016, p. 121). The narrative of the 'immigrant bargain' has been shown to be powerful in part "because it converts the parents' experience of migration into a powerful guideline for the children's goals and conduct" (Legewie, 2016, p. 111).

For those parents who spoke about their migration stories in our study, children are at the centre of the story, and upward mobility is discussed as a family project. The investment parents make in the success of the next generation was described by parents as the main reason why they left their country of origin and/or why they moved to Canada. For example, Mrs. Abdulali says: "I moved to Canada [from Somalia] so my kids could have very good education, very good life...I want it for you, I want good education." Access to a 'good education' "for you" – for the children – is among the most frequently cited reasons that these parents referred to when they talked about moving to Canada. A 'good education' was not explicitly defined but related to the idea of a 'good' education, parents often cited opportunities for educational advancement.

Mr. Moore, who completed college in both Guyana and in Canada, not only told his children about how he sacrificed and worked hard but also how he hopes they will follow his example of hard work to achieve a better life.

You always want to be the best you can and to motivate them. I always show them that when I came here the first 3, 4 years I was working full time and going to school part time in the evening. So for the first 3, 4 years, I was making minimum wages and at the same time going to school, paying for my own education. I had challenges for the first 3 years, but I am happy today that all my schooling is finished and life is better. I want my kids to follow in this.

Mr. Jama, father to Sabia, earlier in his interview related that he was unable to attend post-secondary schooling in Somalia due to political instability. On the topic of success, he stated:

I want to see you succeed. I want to see you become an important human being in this society. I want to see you live comfortably. I want to see you help. For this family, one of us is up, all of us is up. Canada is up. With your education the least you will do is you will help your children and you will help the people around you. So it's important, it's very important for you to study harder than ever.

Mr. Jama's statement embeds Sabia's success in the family's success, and in the success of the community, which adds weight to his focus on his daughter's educational achievements. This is an important point – success is not only about education and work, but about a larger purpose – “you will help” -- that signals the familial and community-oriented ways that students will talk about success in Chapter 5, in the context of thinking about their motivations for working hard.

As previously cited in Chapter two, Hua-Yu and Liu's work (2017) discusses how in the ‘immigrant bargain’ narrative, parents hold high and optimistic expectations for their children, and in turn, the children feel pressure to meet their parents' expectations. Students with high expectations for success will work longer, put more effort into their schoolwork, and are more persistent than those who have low expectations for success. Insofar as students' expectations of

themselves have been shown to have a strong impact on their success, parental expectations such as those shaped by the immigrant bargain narrative can be considered a form of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), whereby parents transfer to their children their high expectations and sense of optimism for their eventual achievement, which are met through success in school/education. Research has confirmed that parental expectations are a predictor of student success (Hua-Yu & Liu, 2017).

Parents' desire to see their children go to university (as opposed to college or any other kind of post-secondary training) might be connected to a larger aspiration to see their children surpass their own level of education. The idea that part of being 'successful' is children attaining more education and higher socioeconomic status than their first-generation parents is an idea expressed by both parents and children in this study. For some of the first-generation parents, the migration process and resettlement interrupted or cut short their educational plans, so children's own educational attainment is meant to fulfill this interrupted education. Most of these parents had some post-secondary education in their country of origin and many attended colleges in Canada,⁴⁰ but most of the children who conducted interviews (twelve of fifteen) would be the first in their families to attain a university degree in Canada.

All three of the parents who had no post-secondary schooling, either in their country of origin or in Canada, referred to their past educational experiences in terms of lacking opportunity or resources: Mrs. Abdulali stated she stopped her education after high school "Because I move to Canada and I start family"; Thuy, translating for her mother Mrs. Nguyen, stated "She only finished up to elementary school because of financial problems and she was living in poverty at the time"; and Mr. Jama, after recounting how he became a refugee to Canada, stated that "there

⁴⁰ Details of the parents' educational background is listed in the chart on pp. 69-70, in Chapter 3.

was no opportunity out there”, in the context of conflict in his country of origin and then later, after his migration to Canada, for him to go to college or university.

In contrast, Ms. Harris, Jalisa’s aunt, was admitted to university as a mature student, but she told her niece how excited she feels about Jalisa being the first in their family to graduate from high school in Canada:

I expect you to further your education. and this high school diploma to further your education. Hopefully in the future, you have a successful career. Education is very important to our family because for our family here in Canada - which is myself, your mom, your dad and your grandma, none of us were actually able to get a high school diploma...so you’re actually going to be the first person in Canada to actually get a high school diploma so it’s a big moment.

Many of the parents referred to opportunities that they gave up, or goals they had that went unfulfilled, because they migrated or faced other hardships. Mr. Williams said that he wanted his daughter Shanelle to pursue a university education to “show that you can do better than we did.” In their family, Mrs. Williams completed university in Canada to be an English teacher, but Mr. Williams did not have any post-secondary education.

Many parents and their children linked education with the theme of helping their families, helping others, and/or helping society. They were not only concerned with job prospects for their children, but about the children following their dreams, interests and desires in the service of others. Mr. Jama, a father who completed high school but could not pursue post-secondary education in Somalia, said:

Education should be that people help other people to achieve their goals and dreams. So I am hoping that [daughter] become that, sometimes she will be. I will be living my dream through her, because I like to help. I did not get the opportunity that she has it.

Mr. Jama referred to how he was unable to access higher education; for him, seeing his daughter Sabia do what he could not do is ‘living his dream’ through her. In his interview, he expressed regret that he was not able to engage in work he saw as having societal benefit but said he will feel good when his daughter is able to achieve this as a result of his sacrifice and hard work in parenting.

Mrs. Nguyen, speaking in Vietnamese, told her daughter, Thuy, how she is making an extra effort to learn English in order to better support Thuy with education, and that on that basis, she chose to live in a ‘good community,’ despite there being few other Vietnamese people. Mrs. Nguyen reassured Thuy she could achieve more than her mother was able to achieve. Thuy translates:

My mom finds education very important since her and my father didn’t get to achieve lots of education in their life. They think, my mom and my parents believe education is a passport to my future. It opens many doors and opportunities.

Mrs. Nguyen also spoke about the importance of her daughter becoming “a good citizen to society...where I can actually help society back.” Here we have a story about the importance of education, the desire for children to become educated in ways that parents could not, both for better futures for their children -- “[education] opens many doors and opportunities” and to “help society” by giving back.

Thuy’s mother touches on another salient point: Many of these parents would have liked to have attained a higher level of education themselves. Most spoke about how, as students, they

had wanted ‘good’ jobs and careers, sometimes mentioning work in the service of others or society, but that their choices after high school were limited because of where they lived (no post-secondary schools nearby) or because of a lack of financial support/privilege. As we have seen previously, a few parents cited migration, poverty or political instability cutting short their education. For example:

Yasir: Alright um, so did you go to university or college?

Mrs. Abdulali: No I didn't

Yasir: Why not?

Mrs. Abdulali: Because I move to Canada and I start family

Thuy, translating for her mother Mrs. Nguyen said, as we have previously noted, “She only finished up to elementary school because of financial problems and she was living in poverty at the time.” Through such narratives, parents emphasize their thwarted desires for education, sharing the context for why it mattered to them that their children were able to complete what they could not.

Many parents spoke about the advantages of coming to a country with better educational opportunities than in their countries of origin. Here are some of the statements parents made:

Mr. Oduro: I really think that Canada is a nice environment for the student and it's just different. You know in Africa the classrooms are just not very high tech, not have a lot of technology... In Canada, you can use computers for research and everything but I did not have access to that so I had to find other resources.

Thuy, translating for her mother Mrs. Nguyen:

My mom says that schools in Canada, compared to Vietnam, they are way larger, they are full with resources... And they have lots of teachers who teach in the school, compared to

schools in Vietnam...There is no substitute teachers in Vietnam, and so if a teacher was away the principal would step in and teach the class.

The interview data showed that parents not only thought highly of Streetsview High (as discussed in previous sections of this Chapter) but that they also thought Canada had well-resourced, good schools, often considered better than what their countries of origin could offer. That said, recall the comments from parents earlier about discipline in schools; parents expressed that they would be in favour of more discipline and structure, as they understood it, at Streetsview.

Only two parents directly mentioned the cost of post-secondary education, or other financial concerns, as a challenge for their children in achieving their ambitious goals. Aunt Helen said: “I think your biggest challenges are, I would say, mainly financial, just being able to pay for your school, finding a means to pay for your school, I think that would be your biggest challenge.” And Mrs. Shaw said: “Money, I think money is the biggest challenge for any parents, most parents.” It is interesting that financial barriers were not often mentioned, or that they were acknowledged without being so concerning as to modify educational goals and plans. For example, in their conversation with daughter Shanelle, Mr. and Mrs. Williams respond that money is a challenge, but that it can be overcome:

Shanelle: what do you think are my biggest challenges to reaching my goals in school, like university.

Mrs. Williams: Money

Mr. Williams: I don't think, because you're well organized and you don't let nothing distract you from your work, so you'll be okay.

Mrs. Williams: Money is not a problem, you can go to the bank and get a loan [daughter laughs], if the bank close down, then that's a problem.

Here, Mrs. Williams clearly recognizes money as a constraint but Mr. Williams counters that by emphasizing that the student's good work habits - "you don't let nothing distract you from your work" -- will mean that money is not an issue. In response, Mrs. Williams confirms that loans are possible as a solution to financial concerns.

Rather than focusing on financial matters or other structural aspects of success, several other parents cited individual traits in their children as the main challenge that might impeded their success. Here are some examples, with parents citing, a too active social life at the expense of school, laziness and failures of self-discipline around screen time as potential challenges for their children:

Thuy said: She [Mrs. Nguyen] belies that my biggest challenges to reach my goals in school are my social life. And she thinks this throughout my whole entire life I have had trouble with balancing friends and going out with friends with my schoolwork. Because I tend to put my friend over my schoolwork. And she always been monitoring me when it comes to working, I mean doing my schoolwork and going out with my friends. She thinks that's one of the biggest challenges that I still have to work on in order to reach my goals because my friends are going out and partying and that can become a barrier to reaching my goals in school and in my future.

In conversation with her daughter, Cheryl emphasized the importance of hard work, and pointed to 'laziness' as a problem:

Laziness. I think you can do way better than what you are doing. You gotta take more initiative and you gotta hit the books, you gotta be more consistent. Consistency pays off.

You gotta be more focused and bring those marks up, so you really gotta apply yourself.

It's what you want, and whatever you put into it, that's what you're going to get out of it. If you don't put anything into it, you're not going to get anything, but if you really work hard at it, it'll pay off.

In a third example, Mr. and Mrs. Powell point to 'time management' and time spent on the computer as challenges for their daughter Kavita:

Kavita: What do you think are my biggest challenges to reaching my goal in school?

Mrs. Powell: Time management!

Kavita: [Laughter]

Mr. Powell: Coming off the computer.

The parents focus on individual challenges tended to point out the behaviours and traits in their children that parents could help influence and that children could learn to better control. Parents wanted more for their children and were generally optimistic about their children achieving more than they did. At the same time, they recognized the financial difficulties they had faced, and expressed concerns about the financial burden of an expensive public university education in Canada, even if they stressed to their children that such obstacles could be overcome, e.g. through loans.

Discussion

The motivation for, and purpose of, post-secondary education is an important theme in the parents' discussions. It is very clear from the transcript texts that the parents valued schooling and education immensely, and they felt strongly that college or university education was a key step to success for their children. Parents (and the students, in informal class discussions) reported being very aware of their children's progress and grades, monitoring their homework

completion regularly and seeking out educational support for their children from family members (often older siblings or cousins), or from tutors or tutoring services. They also mentioned that the topic of education, and how important it is to achieve post-secondary education, were frequently discussed in their households. For example, when Kavita asked her mother to rate the importance of her education on a scale of 1 to 10, Mrs. Walker responded, “It’s more like 20.” In general, parents were very engaged in the conversation about their children’s education, and they were generally clear about what they wanted for their children. Some parents were less talkative, answering questions with short, direct answers, but none refused or showed any uncertainty about answering questions about what they wanted for their children’s futures.

The immigrant bargain is a helpful framework for contextualizing the importance these parents and children placed on education and how they thought of it in relation to success. A key part of the immigrant bargain and sacrifice narratives is that education is assumed to be the route to success in the family’s story; there is very little or no emphasis on other pathways. Legewie (2016) found that for many first-generation parents, education is seen as the best pathway to success, and that narratives like the immigrant bargain “foster upward educational mobility by pushing the internalization of school-oriented norms and values” (Legewie, 2016, p. 124). As data will reveal in Chapter 5, students have largely internalized the ‘sacrifice’ narrative, which both feeds and is bolstered by the ‘immigrant bargain.’ The commonalities and specifics of both these terms will be discussed in Chapter 6, which bridges student and parent data.

Parent hopes for their children may be understood through Yosso’s (2005) concept of aspirational capital, which “refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (p.122).” The parents’ dismissal of financial barriers is one example: these parents know that tuition fees and other costs of post-secondary schooling are

a future challenge, but they maintain the view that these are barriers that can be overcome when the time comes. As Yosso states, this optimistic view helps maintain a “culture of possibility” (p.122) for these young people, in which they can remain hopeful and expect that their hard work will result in them reaching their goals.

Summary

This Chapter discusses the relationship between parents and the school, Streetsview High School. The data showed that many parents expressed very positive views about their community; however, it’s important to note that some Black parents specifically opined on the theme of inter-racial or inter-ethnic relations in the community, pointing to tensions that may have larger implications for social cohesion in the school and community at large. Parents made mostly positive comments about Streetsview, the school, and said they were minimally involved in school life, but they trusted the school and considered themselves very involved in their children’s education overall. This has implications for studies of parental involvement because these parents did not conform to the active volunteer model of parental involvement that often predominates in middle-class school cultures. This Chapter also showed that adults interviewed for this research held high educational aspirations for the children in their families. They hoped a university education would lead to a financially rewarding and stable life, perhaps an easier one than some of them were living at the time. In their interview answers, they emphasized the immigrant bargain and the desire to see their hardships rewarded through the achievements of their children.

Chapter 5: Student Data: Success, Sacrifice, and Parental Understanding of School Life

Introduction

In this Chapter, I report on data collected from student participants through written reflection, focus groups, and field notes. The data is drawn from 22 reflections students were asked to write in May 2012 with the prompt ‘What Is Success.’⁴¹ In their responses, they were told to consider both their ideas and their parents’/family’s ideas about success. These essays, which were on average about 500–750 words (though some students wrote less than a paragraph and others answered in diagrams or point form), were completed late in the school year⁴². For most of the Grade 12 students, it was the final year of high school, and they were awaiting responses to their post-secondary applications and preparing for a significant life transition. Others were planning to return for another year of high school to improve their grades or to take additional courses to make them stronger candidates for their university programs of choice. In focus groups, students were asked about the community they lived in, their parents’ expectations for and involvement in their schooling, their experiences with teachers and peers, and what they learned at Streetsview High School. A table of each focus group and the students’ pseudonyms can be found in Chapter 3, on page 71. In addition to the focus groups and written reflections, this Chapter also draws from my field notes and research project reports.

I have identified three central themes in the data. The first theme relates to students’ ideas and statements about success. The students used common descriptions and similar terminology to write and talk about success, often referring to university education, ‘good jobs,’ and ‘lots of

⁴¹ A copy of the assignment instructions is available in Appendix B, p.219-220.

⁴² A table of all the pseudonyms for students cited in this Chapter is in Chapter 3, p.70-71 (focus groups) and p.75 (written essays). It includes a note on students’ ethnoracial background; other demographic data was not collected about individual students.

money.’ They also consistently mentioned the goal of having a family, often referring to heteronormative and nuclear family structures as their future ideal. For the most part, their statements reflected and were strongly aligned with meritocratic values, where one’s success is seen as the result of individual effort and perseverance and is marked by upward social mobility and wealth accumulation. The second theme I extracted from the data is the importance and persistence of the ‘sacrifice’ narrative, which the students evoked time and again to relate and understand their parents’ aspirations for their education and career pathways. The third theme in this Chapter relates to students’ perceptions of how little their parents knew and understood about their lived experiences at the school and their academic pursuits. While theme one is focused on individual effort, the success accrued from the ‘hard work’ the students speak to will benefit their families, and the data in theme two (parental sacrifice) makes it clear that their individual pursuits are meant to garner rewards for more than just themselves, and that success is relational, and connected to familial goals. This Chapter also reports on what students said about their community, which is sometimes in contrast to what parents said about the community (see Chapter 4).

Students’ Notions of Success Reflect Dominant Discourses of Meritocracy

Students in this study framed their visions for the future and present-day efforts to accomplish their goals through meritocratic discourse. They presented their plans in a straightforward manner, even if their goals were more complex, revealing both individual and familial goals. Most said that through hard work and individual effort, they planned to achieve a good education that would lead to a career, a family, and to financial security (or to personal

wealth). Themes like happiness, family, and personal interest also featured in what they said about their future goals. Consider this passage, written by Meena:⁴³

[I want] a good education and good job, so that at the end I can have a happy life and rich life. My parents' definition of success would be that I become a successful person and that I have a good job. The career that would be successful to me is to become a lawyer since I'm really interested in law and debates, and it would be a great job which has a lot of money, and it's something I'm highly interested in.

Caleb, who is Black, wrote about a similar trajectory but emphasized a focus on the material rewards and having “a wife and two kids”. His reflection included information about his family's move⁴⁴ to Brampton from the Jane and Finch community.⁴⁵ He wrote:

...when I went to school here [Brampton/Streetsview High], things changed. I learned and educated myself. I wanted to become a police officer and make something of myself. Success to me would be accomplishing my goals of becoming a police officer, owning a luxury car, specifically a Lamborghini, and having a wife and two kids, living in a condo somewhere. Success is my goal in life and I will achieve it.

Caleb writes about success as an individual achievement— “I learned and educated myself”— and for him, evidence of success rests in material possessions, notably a luxury sports car, a

⁴³ See Chapter 3, p. 70-71 for a complete list of focus group participants' pseudonyms, including their sex and ethnoracial group.

⁴⁴ As Caleb reveals in a focus group, quoted in Chapter 5, his family consists of his mother and siblings.

⁴⁵ The Jane and Finch community is a neighbourhood in the northwest part of Toronto that is often portrayed in media as ‘troubled.’ Jane and Finch is home to mostly first- and second-generation Canadians. James (2012) finds that the negative perception of the community is a motivating factor for the high educational aspirations of youth who grow up in the area.

heterosexual marriage and nuclear family, a home, and a job (police officer) that carries with it (at least in some circles) respect, power, and a professional persona.

For her part, Divya stated simply that success is “school, job, family and kids.” Both Caleb and Divya reported that they and their parents had a preference and plan for them to achieve a university education, and a realistic assessment of the importance of university degrees to many professional careers, seen as necessary to support the families they aspired to in the future.

As Chapter 2 outlined, meritocracy is a cultural idea and dominant discourse that “entails the idea that whatever your social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunity and mobility for ‘talent’ to combine with ‘effort’ to ‘rise to the top’” (Littler, 2017, p. 16). In other words, wealth and success are commensurate with effort. Conversely, failure to achieve the outcomes promised in merit-based society rests with the individual, too: a lack of effort, poor choices, or a lack of individual talent can be blamed. Examining the students’ statements, they seemed confident about their planned trajectories, which consisted of high school, university, careers, and families, and that they spoke in terms of self-reliance, individual effort, and the importance of hard work.

‘Hard work’ is Key to Success

The meritocratic idea that hard work, determination, and/or ‘not giving up’ are keys to overcoming barriers to success was frequently mentioned by the research participants. For example, in this written passage, Rani links her perseverance to the goal of achieving independence:

It gets difficult sometimes to balance work and five courses plus all the assignments and tests that I get, but I know I can’t give up this year. If I complete my four-year program

for nursing, I would prefer working for a year or two, so after marriage I won't have to depend on my husband or parents all the time.

Rani's 'hard work' is linked to her desire to be self-reliant as a woman in the context of a future, imagined heterosexual marriage, but also as a child relative to her parents, and this too, is part of her motivation to keep up the pace of her work.

Yosso's (2005) notion of aspirational capital, evoked earlier, helps explain why the students in this research articulated 'hard work' as key to success. As parents said in Chapter 4, the financial costs of schooling are a barrier, but they know it can be overcome, and it does not impede their optimism or change the plans they have for their children's futures. The students did not dwell on, or in most cases mention, social structure nor personal circumstances as barriers to success in the focus groups or in their writing. Consistent with their parents, the students show that they are optimistic and that they think about their futures through "narratives of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p.122), which Yosso writes are key assets to success because these ways of thinking stoke the determination with which these first-generation racialized young people approach life. Aspirational capital helps those who may not have the material means to achieve their goals to continue to push toward them anyway.

Further evidence of the aspirational capital shown by these students was captured in my field notes, where I noted much excitement, upbeat discussion (laughing and talking), and positive comments ("It's going to be so fun") in conversations about post-secondary. Since I was a university student, this was the topic I most frequently discussed with students; they were often seeking more information about what to expect. They were curious about my experiences, about program possibilities, and about the culture and social dynamics at university.

As mentioned in the methodology Chapter, these students were in an academic stream that aimed to prepare them for university. As such, they were among the higher achievers in their school, and their hard work had already proven to be key to success. At the same time, research discussed in chapters 1 and 2 point to the importance of cultural capital and other factors in student success, so it is not only their ‘hard work’ that has helped them achieve, and certainly the range of exploration of this dissertation is meant to critique the idea that ‘hard work’ alone, as meritocratic narratives suggest, is not enough. The students in this study talked and planned as if they knew they would be admitted to university, and they expressed little concern about what their plans would be if they were not admitted. As a cohort, they were excited, happy, and in my view, eager to move on to university.

While meritocratic ideas were prominent in their discussions of success, some students also wrote about the importance of contributing to the social good, making a difference in the world, having a positive impact on others, and other humanistic goals. Students also talked about wanting to have families, homes, and they wanted to be happy. These comments are worth considering insofar as they do not ‘fit’ as easily with a conventional meritocratic narrative, at least in neoliberal societies, about success. Here is one example from Malika:

My parents describe success in a weird way. Success for them means being a good person. I was raised with high morals and my parents always told me that money isn’t everything and that being well-respected feels better than being wealthy. My parents’ definition of success helped me shape my view of success.

It is notable that Malika begins by describing the idea that success means being a good person as ‘weird.’ In her view, it is atypical of her parents to value being a good person over being wealthy. This is perhaps an indication that she knows these ideas do not fit into

conventional or neoliberal meritocratic understandings of success. However, these comments do align with other findings on racialized Canadian youth (James & Taylor, 2008, 2022), discussed in Chapter 2, that showed second-generation youth have a desire to use their education to ‘give back’ to others and to help benefit the community in some way. Malika’s response serves as a reminder of the many meanings of success and the role of education in attaining it, for these young people. Elsewhere in the data, we will see evidence of students talking about using their education to help support or repay their parents and families, explicitly or implicitly the behaviour of a “good” successful child, who gives back to the parents and families that have sacrificed for them.

Students Express a Preference for University and for Professional Careers

Overall, the students expressed a resounding preference for a university education over other options, such as college. Here are some examples:

“I think that success for me is when I will get accepted into university and also when I finish university and have a job.” – Nisha

“Success in my education means to obtain a university degree in professional studies and doing well throughout my university career.” – Tracy

“[My parent] would rather have me going to university than college.” – Sara

These students expressed no ambiguity about what they knew their parents wanted for them; they also offered little resistance nor alternative proposals to counter their family’s wishes, which may reflect the close family ties that I observed in my research notes, in focus group comments, and in parent interviews. Certainly, students’ aspirations were closely aligned with those of their parents, suggestive of strong family cohesiveness and overall agreement on educational success

being linked to a university degree. I see evidence in these excerpts of the related concept of familial cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, detailed in Chapter 2), which supports high educational aspirations, as well as the resources such as the time, energy, emotional investment, and familial financial resources it takes to achieve these goals.

Pradeep⁴⁶ expressed that his family held a particularly dismal view of college. He wrote: “everyone in my family thought college is a death trap. They thought you can’t get anywhere with college.” In ~~research~~ field notes, I also noted a strong preference for university over college from the students in class; the view that college led to less well-paying, low-status jobs was frequently expressed. I wrote in my field notes (March 2012) that in one informal conversation, a student joked that only unintelligent people went to college, and another student added that ‘there was nothing wrong with college’ for those who ‘had to’ go. This view, expressed by parents and children, lends weight to the finding that these families believed that their socioeconomic aspirations were best met through university study; disparaging college might have been one way to add emphasis to this point.

In addition to a preference for university, students frequently named professional degrees and careers like ‘doctor’ and ‘lawyer’ as the best or highest achievement to aim for. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Taylor and Krahn (2013) likewise found that first-generation Canadian parents showed a strong preference for university programs that led to professional careers. As Arya wrote:

⁴⁶ Note that Pradeep’s father, Mr. Sharma, is one of the parents whose interview data was presented in Chapter 4.

...a successful life story...includes finishing school (post-secondary), getting a degree in something related to medical/medicine, having a high paid job, getting married, and having kids.

Arya's narrative of upward mobility, and having a family, is consistent with other data in my research; Streetsview High parents and children framed their educational trajectory as an upwardly mobile and intergenerational family project, where a professional degree was seen as both financially useful to the family and prestigious or high status, hence redeeming parental sacrifices for these children. Although data on family income and parent occupation were not gathered in the research, they appeared to be from a range of socio-economic positions. I know of students who said their parents were doctors and lawyers, and also of students who talked about their parents working in jobs in the service and retail industries. Despite the diversity of socio-economic status, all the parents aimed to see their children achieve university-degrees and professional careers.

Students and Parents Negotiate Career Directions

If there was strong family cohesion, this does not mean that all families were without friction. Sabia expressed a desire to pursue a career path that differed from her parents' preference. Recall that Mr. Jama, Sabia's father, talked in Chapter 4 about his education being disrupted due to political conflict in Somalia. He also mentioned wanting to see his daughter become an important person in society through her education, and that he saw her education as representing the whole family's success. Sabia wanted to take legal studies, but her parents "had already decided" that they wanted her to pursue medicine. Despite both being highly respectable and difficult-to-achieve careers, she wrote that she would reconsider her plans if it were to cause conflict with her parents:

I would love to go into law but if it were to compromise the relationship I have with my parents I would reconsider this pathway. My parents' idea of success is very straight and clear cut. They want me to have a six-figure salary. Prior to Grade 12, when I took science and math courses, my parents had already decided that they wanted me to go into university and receive a science degree, despite the fact that I did not enjoy or excel. My parents and I, although most of the time, do see eye to eye. There are some things that we don't agree on to this day. They still want me to pursue a science career even though I am not taking any science courses.

Sabia's comments reveal a few points that merit discussion. First, it is clear she is committed to maintaining a good relationship with her parents. In her reluctance to upset this family dynamic, she is willing to change career goals, even though, as she states, she did not excel in science. In fact, Sabia writes that she is not taking any science classes, suggesting significant resistance to her parents' wishes, insofar as science classes are a prerequisite to medical school. This suggests greater ambivalence towards her parents' desires than her stated willingness to change careers to please them. Second, her perception of her parents' focus on a university degree and financial security is evident in the comments about aiming for a "science degree" and on the importance of a "six-figure salary." The prestige of a career in medicine may also be part of why her parents desire her to pursue the sciences; recall her father's earlier mention of wanting to see her become an important person in Canadian society.

Radha was also at odds with her parents over a career direction. She reported sticking to a "rebellious" decision to become a teacher despite the wishes of her dad and "everyone" else that she become a doctor:

I've decided to become a teacher. The funniest part is that my dad always told me to become a doctor and everyone agreed with him. I've always been very rebellious, so I told everyone that I wanted to become a teacher and none of them would change my mind. To my dad, I would only be successful if I made tons of money every year. I want nice clothes, a nice car, and a nice house. But as long as I can provide my children with proper necessities and vacations then I'm happy.

Radha notes her father's focus on a high-paying career, as well as the "nice clothes...nice car...and a nice house" that signify success for her. It is not clear here whether Radha agrees with her father's definition of success, although she appears to contrast her father's desire that she earns "tons of money" with more modest ambitions for "nice" clothing, a car and house and an ability to provide future children with what they need, as well as holidays.

Her mention of her future children/family is a recurring theme in many of the students' narratives of success in both boys and girls. Radha has received pushback from her father and family on her desire to be a teacher, which may be surprising given it is a very stable, middle-class career in Canada. However, it is not as high-status or potentially financially rewarding as being a doctor. So perhaps this is a case of parents aiming for the highest achievements, preferring 'doctor' over 'teacher' for their child.

The friction that existed between Sabia, Radha, and their parents over career choice is a dynamic that Taylor and Krahn (2013) observed in their study of first-generation racialized Canadian youth and their parents. That is, as summarized in Chapter 1, while children generally conformed to their parents' wishes for them to pursue a university education, some tried to change their parents' aspirations when it came to specific career paths. Others, like Sabia, sought to make their parents' preferences impossible, notably by avoiding the required courses. Yet

others avoided even this kind of rebellion and several students in this study echoed what Taylor and Krahn (2013) found among a similar Canadian cohort: that family cohesiveness was at times prioritized over individual preferences, and that the youth took care to negotiate program or career changes in a way that aimed to minimize conflict between them and their parents.

Many students noted that their definitions of success matched those of their parents. On the topic of educational ambitions and career goals, and how to achieve these, some students wrote that they had little conflict or differences with their parents' idea that hard work would lead to financial success, a family, a home, and a white collar or high-status job. This theme was represented by Priyanka, who included a Venn diagram at the top of her written reflection:

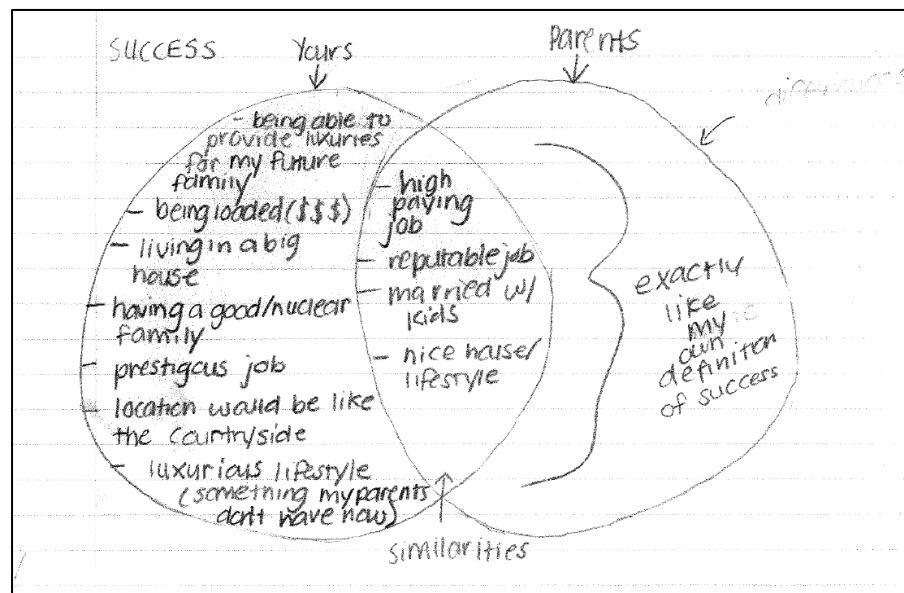


Illustration 1. 'What is success' reflection assignment.

Priyanka's illustration includes goals such as having a job that is both "reputable" and "high paying," achieving a "good/nuclear" family life and doing better than her parents in terms of financial wealth. These factors are represented as contributing to a "luxurious lifestyle," which, she writes, is "something my parents don't have now." The idea of doing better than one's parents is taken up in the discussion of the next theme.

If many students expressed ideas about being a “good” person and “giving back” many others discussed success in relatively material terms—house, car, job, lots of money, vacations, marriage, and children. This seemingly uncritical acceptance of materialistic definitions of success may reflect the limitations of the interviews, which did not ask students to voice the critiques they may hold about the systems that shape their lives. Underlying the material goals and talk of financial wealth is the notion that this will be earned (and therefore, merited) through hard work, dedication to achievement, and (as discussion in the next section) in part due to the investments and sacrifices that parents make for their children. While they appear to speak in materialistic terms, it could be that they have unarticulated doubts about the system being truly fair. Critical race scholars have ample evidence to show race-based inequities in education (Black Community Action Network Peel, 2021; Brunet & Galarneau, 2022; Childs et al., 2015; Do, 2015; Guppy & Lyon, 2019; Hou & Chen, 2019; James, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2019; Latif, 2019; Ramos, 2012; Robson et al., 2019; Schick & St. Denis, 2005; St. Denis, 2011), as reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. Finally, as we will see below, many students emphasized that their financial success would be shared with their families, so redeeming their parents’ sacrifices in enabling their children to access an education.

The Sacrifice Narrative and How Students Understand their Parents’ Expectations for Them

The Context of Familial Closeness

In the previous Chapter, parents expressed their aspirations for their children, often framed as a family and intergenerational goal. To understand how the children take up their parents’ goals for them, it is important to know that many students commented on their close bonds with family

as an important part of their lives. In the research team's collective Year 1 report (2012, p. 2-3), research assistant Selom Chapman-Nyaho noted:

It seems that for many of the youths, family offered some sort of safe haven from the pressures of peers and society. "When I'm at home I can be myself," was a commonly referenced notion. Additionally, the students tended to have larger families than average⁴⁷ and were frequently connected to their extended families. Many of the students' grandparents and/or uncles and aunts lived with them. Alternately their extended family would live close by (for example: one student's grandparents lived with her uncle's family). It's remarkable the extent to which they portrayed their family members as always supporting them or doing anything for them. (Year 1 report, 2012, p. 2-3)⁴⁸

There is evidence of the close-knit nature of many of these families throughout the data. Many (but importantly, not all) students reported having close relationships with their families, a positive sense of belonging, and a strong sense that they could rely on their families. For example, Sana said in a focus group:

My family is one of the most important things to me, and at home I'm always with them, and I know that I have no threat of the outside world. It's just that sense of belonging and it helps the relationship with my parents and my family, my brother, my grandma, and everyone else who lives inside [the house].

A similar feeling was expressed in a different focus group by Alex, who said:

⁴⁷ This is consistent with national data, in which the average Canadian household size was 2.47 in 2017. In Ontario, it was 2.58 (Statistics Canada, 2017). In 2016, Brampton had the largest average household size among the 25 most populated municipalities in Ontario, at 3.5 (Frisque, G., 2022).

⁴⁸ This unpublished report is not included as an appendix because it would reveal the identity of the school and of individual research participants. The report was written by research assistant Selom Chapman-Nyaho.

I'd probably say family is first because they will always be there for you no matter what.

They will love you no matter what...my grandparents is family, same thing. They give you money or whatever you need. They wouldn't hesitate to give it to you.

These sentiments are very strong: family is presented as a haven from a perhaps difficult external world, and a place of unconditional support and love -- "they will love you no matter what".

Within his family, Caleb explained that schooling, education, and his social life are frequent subjects of conversation between he and his parents:

They talk to us about it [schooling/education] every day. Like my mom would be like: 'okay, how is your application going? How's school? How are your friends?'. Like she knows a few of my friends. She'd be like: 'How are your friends?' all the time. She'd ask about [teacher's name] all the time. My mom's favourite teacher is [teacher's name]; mine too; because they met each other, and my mom loves [teacher's name].

Everyday conversations and shared goals around education, and their lives at the school -- their friends, their teachers, as in the quote above -- may have been part of the sense of closeness in these families. Such comments starkly contrast with the school administration's impression that parents were "not involved" in their children's education.

The Sacrifice Narrative

Many students were very committed to, and felt a sense of obligation toward, fulfilling goals their parents had for them, in particular, a university education. At the same time, their narratives were not purely individualistic -- their individual goals were very much tied to fulfilling family-oriented goals and repaying their parents for the sacrifices they made for them. This section explores this important motivation: the understanding that these parent participants

had sacrificed and worked hard so that their children could have access to better opportunities than they had; or than would have been available in their countries of origin.

The sacrifice narrative had a powerful influence on how the students thought about their education. It was also present in the parents' data, discussed in the previous Chapter.⁴⁹ I use the term 'sacrifice narrative' in this discussion because it is the term that students most often used, and as explained in Chapter 1, because this usage helps to focus on the daily, ongoing, consistent ways that parents and families look to ensure their children's success through personal sacrifice. For example, in this excerpt from Jaspreet:

Success to me means establishing myself into a career and earning money. As materialistic as this may seem, my goal in life is to avoid living the life that my parents have been leading. I feel as if my parents have not been able to make the most of the lives because of their constant sacrifice for my education.

Like her peers, Jaspreet planned to attend university. Here, she explicitly links her motivation to her parents' sacrifices for her. This supports Legewie's (2016) study, which showed that the sacrifice narrative can help encourage and motivate youth to pursue upward educational mobility. Other students shared similar sentiments in their written reflections:

My goals are for this year is to be able to get into a college or university, so that way I can make my parents proud knowing that they didn't suffer parts of their lives trying to put me where I am today for no reason. - Gurleen, South Asian young woman.

⁴⁹ For parents, the sacrifice narrative is part of the 'immigrant bargain,' a bargain that pays off when their children attain a higher level of education and socioeconomic class than they have.

I owe it to them [parents] to get into something and achieve the best to my abilities. –

Navjeet, South Asian young man

My father and mother always busted their bum off to work for their family so that we can endless opportunities, and I would like to thank both my parents for what they have done and I would want to be just like my parents how they were to us (my brother and I) support and always there for us...going to university is important for them, so it is important to me. – Derek, Black young man.

Since my parents worked hard unlike myself, I do feel that I will be inspired to work hard like how my family has throughout the future and one day show my entire family that I can achieve something amazing, with my education. – Ari, South Asian young man

Ari, in the latter quote, admits that he has not worked as hard as his parents⁵⁰, but that his family's example to him is inspiring. Many of the students talked about how hard their parents worked and how their parents or families sacrifice for them. As Yosso (2005) might observe, these are forms of aspirational and familial capital that these children draw on as motivating forces to help them keep working toward their goals and that imbue them with resilience in the face of challenges⁵¹ (Rocha et al., 2022).

⁵⁰ Ari does not elaborate here, but records show that he was a student who missed most classes; he may have been struggling academically, and this could be what he is referring to here when he says that “unlike” his parents, he has not worked hard. He was also one of the students who did not complete his parent interview assignment.

⁵¹ Many of the students in this study linked this sense of sacrifice to their family's migration story and the opportunity for them to get a good education. My field notes based on informal conversations in class showed that family origin and migration stories were often mentioned in the context of discussions about educational plans, university applications, and what students were going to do in the upcoming year. Details usually included parents' countries of origin, some information on the circumstance that brought them to Canada, and which family members came. There was a myriad of stories: some families needed to leave countries of origin due to economic reasons or due to strife; some came to Canada seeking business opportunities; and others were reuniting with family who had

In another example from a focus group, students talk about how their parents tell them about the hardships they endured, in order to motivate their children:

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of the kinds of things they say to push you?

What are the messages there?

Jayden: 'Back in the day when I did this, I was so smart.'

Arjun: Or 'you guys are so lucky to have this opportunity.'

Joshua: The opportunity card.

Interviewer: Tell me more about that.

Joshua: It's like they tell you: 'Back when I was in Somalia, I didn't have the chance to do what you're doing now. I didn't have the chance to go to school at this age, I was with my little sister, helping.'

Interviewer: Does it motivate you?

Joshua: It does, it does. Because sometimes I want to put my feet up. They just tell you: 'I had to move to a different country to get the education that I had'. Because my mom, she moved from Somalia to Italy. So she was like: 'Look how many times I had to move in order to get an education. But you're here, everything is in walking distance - school's here, work's there, you do everything'. And it just makes me feel bad that I have so much, basically in my hands, and they had to like, work hard.

These conversations made it clear that students understood educational opportunities and their future wellbeing to be important motivators for their parents to come to Canada. These were not

already migrated to Canada. I captured many instances where students told me that their parents had 'better jobs' in their countries of origin, but I did not gather specifics about those jobs.

the only motivators for migration: parents and students also mentioned economic hardship, political instability or conflict, and family reunification, among other factors. However, for the children, the most frequently mentioned and significant motivator that they perceived pushed their parents to move to Canada was a focus on educational opportunities for children. This finding aligns with research presented in Chapters 1 and 2, in which Costigan et al. (2016) found that while the motivations of incoming Canadians are most often thought of in economic terms, the second most common motivation to come to Canada given (in this case given by Chinese Canadian respondents) was educational opportunities for their children.

A consistent theme is that they felt they were getting a good education and moving on to good universities with opportunities to pursue their career goals. In this excerpt, Jalisa, the niece of Ms. Harris (quoted in Chapter 4) explicitly links migration to Canada and educational aspirations:

...in the perception of my parents it was very important for me to attend school and university seeing as it is the reason why they immigrated to Canada.

Hence, the student here emphasizes that her education matters because “it is the reason” that her parents immigrated. Students like Jalisa felt a strong obligation to continue to university, as a way of making good on her parent’s immigrant sacrifice. The data shows further evidence that students’ sense of obligation to their families was at least in part motivated by the sacrifice narrative. Several students mentioned that they were already working and contributing to the family income; others talked about their sense of indebtedness and future plans to help their parents financially, as evidenced in these examples:

Asif, South Asian young man,: The thing is if you save up to buy your own house, from my opinion, to me you’re selfish, because your parents, they’ve been supporting you, your

education, they've raised you, and then you're just like, going to keep your money to yourself, and then you move away and leave them there, right? I consider it my responsibility. They raised me; they brought me to Canada for a better life and what not. So the least I could do is just stay with them, help them out, so I'd want to save my own money. But right now, I work two jobs and whatever I make I give it to my parents. I don't even have a bank account and I've been working for a year now, more than a year.

In this excerpt, this student emphasizes his sense of “responsibility” to parents who sacrificed – “they brought me to Canada for a better life” -- that so paying his parents back by working “two jobs” and giving all his pay “to my parents” is natural. This nuances the “materialistic” success referenced earlier by some students since earnings – and imagined future earnings – are repositioned as a shared resource belonging to the parents or family rather than the child. In a similar vein, Marwa, a Middle Eastern young woman, observes there is an unspoken understanding that all family financial resources will be pooled:

It's not something my mom said, “You better give me money when you have money.”

She's never told me that, but out of respect. My mom has...six kids. She worked hard to get to where she was, so it's just respect. Like, now my brother who's in the second year of university, he doesn't live at home; he lives in [the city], like close to [the university].

But he works too; but whenever he gets paid, they don't ask, he just gives it to them. And then my other brother, he's just starting school, he works at the airport. He always gives.

It's not something he's forced to do; they just do it.

Here we learn that parents “work hard” and therefore children, both in the home and those living away, naturally contribute to the household as their own contribution. This is not a burden but a matter of “respect” or, as we saw earlier with Asif, a “responsibility.”

Sharing finances was seen as important and so was supporting partners in their old age, so that filial obligation was a very strong theme across many different students:

Nisha, who is South Asian, wrote: I think that after university is finished, I will live with my parents and help them out with money.

Sabia, who interviewed her father Mr. Jama, said:

I'm not going to move out, because like my parents have done so much for me, they've raised me, 20 something years, I'm not going to abandon them when they're old, right? I'm going to stay with them.

In the examples above, the youth reveal a well-defined sense of responsibility, gratitude, and a feeling of obligation to repay their parents for their sacrifices and hard work supporting their children. As we have seen, these families are characterized by close-knit relations, shared values, and an intergenerational focus on children's success. In this context, these youths' narratives about helping their families are evidence of how the values of hard work, shared family resources, and common goals are put into practice.

In addition, the recordings from focus group discussions with the students, their tone reveals that there was a sense of pride when they talked about giving back to their families. In general, the focus groups participants had positive and supportive responses to this line of shared storytelling in the group. Most youth were eager to share how they do, or plan to, help their families. The students talked about helping their parents as a normal and expected part of family life, rather than exceptional. In Yosso's (2005) formulation, familial capital like this can create a family norm of mutual support and a milieu in which care for one another is routine; this in turn reinforces kinship bonds and provides every member a purpose and role to play.

The larger purpose for parental sacrifice—the overarching goal of socioeconomic mobility—is evident in many of the students’ statements about fulfilling their parents’ wishes to see them succeed educationally. In these excerpts, success and hard work are framed as part of a larger family story about sacrifice. Sonia, a young Black woman observes:

I realized how many of the dreams that she [mother] had for herself were shattered because she had to come to Canada. I did not know that my mother wanted to become a teacher, but because of the daily struggles, she endures working in a factory. She tends to hope that one day her dreams will be fulfilled through her daughters. She wants me to get an education which will provide me with something better than her tough nine to five factory job. Growing up and seeing my mother sore from her job really took a toll on the person that I have become. Everything I do is for my mother - for her sweats and tears to pay off. I hope one day in the future I can look at my mom and say: ‘we did it ma.’ –

Sonia’s story is a quintessential sacrifice narrative: her mother’s dreams to become a teacher (as stable, professional career) went unfulfilled, so she “endures” doing factory so that “her dreams will be fulfilled through her daughters”. Her daughter in turn wants to give back: “Everything I do is for my mother”. In Sonia’s story, success is defined intergenerationally, hence the student’s hope to be one day able to say, “*we* did it” (emphasis added). Further evidence of the ways that parental sacrifice motivated hard work by students and even a desire “to be a better person” were expressed by many students. For instance:

My mom wanted to give us a better life. We made the move and I like it here much better, but it also encourages me to work harder and be like a better person. – Sana, East Asian young woman, focus group C.

I realize that my education does not only benefit me but also my parents. Since my parents did not get the chance for education, they want their daughter to be able to be successful. Therefore, it puts pressure on me because I want my parents to be proud. –

Anaya, South Asian young woman, participant in focus group D

These two excerpts, and Sonia's quote above, are good examples of students referring to their educational attainment in 'us/we' language, seeing it as a mutual achievement which their parent(s) are responsible and will feel a sense of pride. The multiple meanings of education for these students are worth noting. Sonia is deeply impacted by seeing her mother work in a physically tiring role in a factory and knows that it would be deeply meaningful ("her dreams will be fulfilled") to see her daughter succeed. Sonia, and many of the students in this study, show evidence of having accepted and integrated their family story into their own sense of self, and this provides a kind of internal logic for hard work. The students talked about wanting to see the sacrifice of their parents 'pay off,' wanting to feel pride, and feeling 'encouraged' and 'pressured' to stay on course. These are all strong emotional motivations. Importantly, the students expressed these narratives and ways of thinking as important to who they are, and they talked about sharing these views with their parents.

The idea of being responsible for redeeming parents' hardship and sacrifice is also referenced in discourse about 'doing better than' one's parents. 'Doing better' implies upward social mobility, which, as we have seen, is defined as a university education, and often, a professional career. Perhaps the focus on achieving tangible outcomes like university degrees are targets for these families because they are clear signals of upward mobility, achievements families can pinpoint as milestones on the journey. As Gurleen wrote, her family goal is for her

to have “an easy life that they were probably not able to have.” Her statement implies that her parents lived through challenges or difficulties that they hope she will not have to suffer. Anil, Shani and Navjeet put it as follows:

Success for my parents is doing better and having a better life than what they have. A lot of our parents in this class are immigrants and every parent wants us to do the best, but my parents want me to do better and have better opportunities than them, that will mean maybe university. Anil, South Asian young man, focus group B.

Since my parents did not get the chance for education, they want their daughter to be able to be successful. Therefore, it puts pressure on me because I want my parents to be proud and that all the hard work in providing money isn't a waste of time. – Shani, Black young woman, written reflection.

...it (education) will make a difference in my parents' life because their child accomplished in their career and education because they could not complete their education. Therefore, attending university is a big deal for both my life and my parents.” – Navjeet, South Asian young man, written reflection.

The students' statements recall literature cited in earlier Chapters on the importance of narratives of sacrifice and opportunity for first-generation families (Hua-Yu & Liu, 2017; Legewie, 2016; Louie, 2004; Nesteruk, 2022; Rocha et al., 2022; Taylor & Krahm, 2013; Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). As Rocha et al. (2022) write, “For many children of immigrants, obtaining a college education means much more than living a better lifestyle. It means acknowledging the hardships and sacrifices their parents lived and continue to live to ensure

better life outcomes for their children” (p. 199). The stories that parents tell their children about their child-centred reasons for migration serve as motivation for these students, encouraging the idea of school success as an important norm and, often, as the only sure pathway for upward social mobility (Louie, 2004). Rather than asking how these families persist despite the hardships they reference, using the lens of community cultural wealth, we can see how their circumstances, including the challenges they face, are in fact useful motivators that help to sustain ‘promotive narratives’ (Legewie, 2016) of intergenerational sacrifice and success. For these students, an intergenerational family focus on educational success is sustained through stories, talk, and values that emphasize hard work and the obligation or indebtedness that children have toward their parents, as Nesteruk (2022) has discussed.

Several students also mentioned being motivated by the importance of being the first in their families to go to university. Two students referenced how a family member’s failed attempts at university resulted in what they felt was added pressure on them to succeed. For example, Nisha wrote:

I think the reason why I try way harder to be successful, is because my brother dropped out of school. So my mom has a lot of expectations from me. She always tells me that: ‘Your brother didn’t finish school but I want you to study hard and be successful.’

The following passage written by Gabrielle reflects a similar theme:

My parents are so focused on me getting into university because of my cousins not finishing university. My parents want me to be the first child that goes to university and finishes university.

Research has shown that parental expectations are a predictor of success in the children of first-generation Canadians (Hua-Yu & Liu, 2017; Pearce & Lin, 2007). Parental expectations could be a burden for these students, and, as we see above, some experienced this as significant pressure, especially when siblings or cousins did not fulfill their part of the immigrant bargain. If they generally spoke about their goals and their parents' aspirations for them in optimistic terms—if they had doubts or didn't expect to succeed, they did not reveal this in their responses – they also mentioned pressures. This is what Yosso (2005) calls aspirational capital: a “culture of possibility” that supports the mental resilience that allows people to maintain high hopes even in the face of barriers and where familial pressure may be enabling in creating high expectations.

Educational Success is an Intergenerational Family Project

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, and supported by my findings, second-generation children's educational attainment is an intergenerational shared family goal for many first-generation families (Hua-Yu & Liu, 2017; Legewie, 2016; Rondini, 2016; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). There is some indication, supported by other research with first-generation parents - that in making children's educational attainment a familial goal, parents use their children's academic accomplishments as proxies for their own success (Legewie, 2016; Kang & Larson, 2014; Nesteruk, 2022; Rondini, 2016; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). In other words, parents' fulfillment of the 'immigrant bargain' (discussed at length in the next Chapter) rests in their children accomplishing specific goals around which parents have structured their lives and invested considerable resources in achieving. In some cases, students and parents specifically note that parents had to give up middle-class lives, while others fled lives of relative deprivation, in their countries of origin or have unfulfilled career or educational goals. In this context of the sacrifice narrative, such hardships become motivation for the next generation's redemptive success.

Rondini's (2016) research showed that parents' focus on their children's academic accomplishments as proxies for success can help to sustain, and leave unquestioned, a belief in meritocracy, which is used to encourage and motivate their children. Parents reframed their own limited success in ways that did not disrupt the 'American Dream' story (or 'Canadian Dream' – the notion that hard work yields success) (Rondini, 2016). Instead, they extended the story to include their children, who were the beneficiaries of intergenerational hard work; the gains for hard work are accrued in the next generation, their children. For many of these parents, opportunities to fulfill the promises of meritocracy were thwarted by external circumstances; many of them never had the chance to succeed in their ways that their children might.

In their study with racialized Canadian university students who were part of an access program,⁵² James and Taylor (2008) found that it was important for these students to maintain a belief in meritocracy; to do otherwise may be akin to admitting that their aspirations, and those of their parents, may not come to fruition. As James and Taylor (2008) write, "Although aware of the structural realities of racism and other related barriers, these youth took a position, consistent with the discourse of merit: that education had worked, was working, and would continue to work for them" (p. 585). For the children of first-generation parents who took part in this research study, the intergenerational story of parental sacrifice was used as a form of familial and aspirational capital to help motivate, sustain, and build resilience and perseverance. These forms of cultural wealth help explain why the students were so sure of their goals, but it also leads to the question of how they will incorporate struggles, or incomplete achievement of their goals, into their meritocratic and individualistic beliefs in a positive or productive manner. In

⁵² The term 'access program' refers to university entrance programs that accommodate non-traditional pathways. Typically, these programs benefit racialized, minoritized, and other disadvantaged groups of students. For example, high school leavers, mature students and other adult learners, or those with non-academic credentials.

meritocratic terms, any disappointments, or constraints these young people face will be the result of personal choices, circumstances, deficits, or mistakes. This is not, however, an accurate or complete analysis of how life works. For example, it is absent of any consideration of social structures or larger social, political, economic, or other forces, including racism, at play.

Students Perceive Their Parents Have a Poor Understanding of Their Lives and Schooling

Data analyzed in the previous two sections showed some of the many ways the Streetsview students and their parents shared values, perspectives, and goals around education and meritocratic notions of success. However, while students emphasized agreement with their parents' goals and expectations for them, they often remarked how little their parents knew or understood their everyday lives or the pressures they faced. The prevailing sentiment was parents were unaware or ignorant of the ways that school and social life played out for their children.

Intergenerational Differences

Many of these students had complex lives and faced difficult circumstances. Some had lost parents recently; one had a mother with a recent cancer diagnosis; and many spoke of parents with busy work schedules and financial concerns. While students recognized and talked about their parents' stressors and sacrifices, they also reported that their parents were largely unaware of how stress and challenges were impacting their own lives. For example, Tina wrote:

If I am accepted into university this year, I will be the first family member on my mother's side to pursue a post-secondary education. My mother has a problem realizing how stressed out I am, causing her to have a poor understanding of how much I am taking on myself. My brother and I live alone with her and I am the only working individual in my household. Just last year my father passed away due to his drug addiction which has

allowed me to take on reality and become an independent and more stronger person than I have ever been. I am proud of myself for getting this far. People do not realize how easy they have life.

Tina is coping with several difficulties, including dealing with hardship and grief, and she uses resilient language – “an independent and more stronger person” – to frame how these circumstances are affecting her. While Tina presents her challenges as motivating factors that have resulted in her successfully taking on a lot of responsibility, she also points out that her mother is not very aware of how “stressed out” she is; this student (and her family) have experience loss and grief, and her story is not one that reflects the oft-cited narrative of an easier life for children raised in Canada. Instead, this young person is required to shoulder a lot of responsibility in a context of loss, while also trying to pursue her education. Still, in Tina’s view, her mother is not fully aware of the stress Tina feels, unfamiliar with the day-to-day responsibilities and tasks that her daughter must meet in a context of extraordinary emotional demands, including the death of a parent.

Most of the students reported that their parents were similarly unaware. One student suggested that their parents were “clueless,” about many aspects of their lives, including (but not limited to) the school system, academic responsibilities, and social realities. Yasir’s written reflection presented one of the few explicit challenges to the meritocratic assumptions linking university and successful job:

I do not believe my parents understand how school life is like now because it is very much different from when they went to school and now even the most educated individuals cannot find a job in their field. My parents believe that going to university automatically means you will end up with a job, which is far from true.

Yasir points to intergenerational differences between his and his parents' experiences at school and his concerned that a university education will not yield the results his parents expect. Recall that Yasir's mother, interviewed in Chapter 4, expressed how she was motivated to come to Canada in part because she viewed it as beneficial to her children's education. While the data is limited, not least by the length of the interviews, like Yasir, students expressed some pessimism about, or perhaps a critique of, structures or systems, a contrast to the mostly optimistic comments about their futures as expected by their parents, and as highlighted in early sections.

Anthony expressed a similar sentiment to Yasir, but focused on how his mom often compares her experiences to his in an attempt to motivate him. He begins by saying that he tells his mom very little about his life at school:

...because first off, you don't really tell them anything... my mom's expectation of me going to school is you go to school, get your education, do your work, shut up, like that's basically what it is. But like sometimes of course, it's not like that...I tend to slack off and, and like sometimes she would try to compare her days to these modern days and it's way different, like completely different...because now that we get more help than she did, because she said she was lost, she didn't really get no support. So she kind of uses that, and like and she says you should be doing this, getting this, and all that good stuff, so yeah.

Anthony blames his own individual behaviour ("slacking off") for his academic performance and says that his mother points to her own struggles and lack of resources to motivate him to make the most of his opportunities. His mother indicates that she knows there are resources available to her son – "we get more help than she did" – so she is not uninformed about the school system.

When discussing how little their parents knew and understood about their lives, the students often referred to the idea that times have changed, suggesting they understood their circumstances as different from their parents' lived experiences. Pavan pointed to the lack of understanding his parents had around his social life:

...socializing is such a big part these days, but back then it was just like school, home, chores, and stuff like that. We have to go through all this stuff alone and they can't relate, they never went through this.

While it is perhaps true that all children feel like their parents cannot relate to them because of differences in society across time (generational differences), it is also important to note, from a critical race perspective, that these families were first- or second-generation in Canada, and these young people were growing up in a specific Canadian cultural context shaped by settler colonialism, multicultural policy, neoliberalism, and other social frameworks and ideologies detailed in Chapters 1 and 2. Perhaps generational differences were felt more acutely by some of the children as a result of having been socialized and growing up in very different cultural and social contexts (in which technological and communication practices have been greatly changed) than their parents. Additionally, many of the students spoke English as a first language while their parents spoke other first languages, indicating the possibility of linguistic barriers or differences in these families.

Student Perspectives on Parental Involvement

As discussed earlier, the topic of parental involvement in the school was one of the initial reasons the school and the York Centre for Education and Community began conversations about conducting research in 2009. As this section will show, most students perceived their parents to be very interested in, and involved in, their education broadly, even as they reported

that their parents know little about their daily lives, social lives, extra-curricular activities and/or specific course activities at Streetsview High.

In focus groups and in informal class discussions, the students expressed that grades and academic achievement were what mattered most to their parents; extracurricular activities and other non-academic events were not considered worth their (often limited) time. For example, students told me that sports games were mostly attended by other students, some of the teachers, and students from other schools; only a few parents came. According to the students, their parents did not participate in such supplementary or after-school activities because they did not think they were important.

As we have seen, parents were very involved when it came to emphasizing academic achievement and participating in academic-oriented events. The parent-teacher night and the university information session held by the school were both very heavily attended by parents. However, parents were not involved in the day-to-day operation or governance of the school, extra-curricular activities (like fundraising initiatives), parent council meetings, or volunteer positions that required dedicated time. As data in Chapter 4 showed, parents held the school in high esteem and were generally quite satisfied with what they understood to be the high-quality education⁵³ their children were receiving. Teachers at the school shared with the research team that in their view, parents were content as long as they believed their children were doing well, and there were no academic or discipline problems. This idea was explored and supported by analysis of the parents' own statements in the Chapter 4.

⁵³ A more fulsome discussion of why parents thought the school provided a 'good' and 'high quality' education is in Chapter 5.

The students reported that their parents used grades as the main indicator of how well their children were doing in school—and got more involved if there were educational concerns.

Here are some examples of statements to this effect in the focus groups:

It depends on my marks, like if my marks are a little below average they would come to every parent-teacher meeting, and then the school is good at informing my parents, which I don't like... – Gabrielle.

They never came [to the school] and then Grade 11, I started slacking off. Like in Grade 9, 10, I was doing well, my parents never came to the school. – Asif

In the case of Gabrielle and Asif, if the parents are not attentive to what children are doing at school as long as their grades are deemed acceptable by the parents, they are alert to declines in student performance and become involved when children are doing less well or “slacking off” as Asif puts it. There appears to have been some variability among students and their families. A few students commented on how their parents were too busy to come to the school for activities not directly related to their child's individual progress. Many of the parents either worked late or did shiftwork (it is possible that parents could not attend parent-council type meetings due to the timing). If Caleb, who previously mentioned his family's move from Toronto to Brampton, spoke how his mom was unable to “be aware” and “keep track” of him, his schoolwork, and his siblings, he clearly explains it is not through lack of care but time, because she worked two jobs:

I only live with my mom, she tries to be aware of my schoolwork and stuff like that, but she's so busy, she works two jobs just to support me and my three siblings, because she was a dropout, she dropped out in Grade 10 because she had to work...so she wants me to graduate and everything, get all my schoolwork and stuff, just so I can get a better job,

I don't have to work as hard as she did in the future, but at the same time, she doesn't, she can't keep track as well as she would want to because she's busy doing all this stuff, she's barely home.

Caleb knew his mother was invested in his education, though her capacity to monitor his schoolwork was limited. In families like Caleb's, where parents have limited time and cannot effectively follow their children's academic progress, extracurricular and other activities were even less consistently attended to by parents.

Not unlike Caleb, Anil also shared a story that demonstrated what he felt was his parents' lack of awareness of his life, compounded by busy work schedules. Earlier, a quote from Anil showed that he understood success to mean he should 'do better' than his parents. Here, he started by explaining that despite him being a strong player on the school's football team, his parents had never seen him play because they always had to work. He continued:

I was like one of the best tacklers [on the football team], so then my coach would um, on the day that they would come [to the game], we were playing really strong, so my coach would reserve me for the second half so I would be at full energy right, so I was sitting at the side and then my mom's like 'What the hell are you doing? You must be so shit that your coach makes you sit on the bench....' When my coach actually put me on the field I'd play for like 5 minutes, I'd look back and they're gone...my dad had to go to work.

Anil's story is complex. While he expresses a desire for his parents to see him play, his story also reveals the ways that his parents' lack of familiarity with the sport led them to less-than-complimentary opinions about Anil's talents or skill. While students expressed that they perceived their parents to be rather 'clueless' about their school lives, Anil's story is one where parental opportunities to learn about extra-curricular sports were limited by their employment

demands. Although extra-curricular activities do not seem generally to be highly valued by parents, structural factors like work schedules, transportation issues, and parenting duties for other children, appear to have limited the involvement of parents in such issues. In the absence of clear outreach on such concerns, moreover, parents seem to have little opportunity to become aware of the importance of extra-curricular activities, including sports, for some university scholarships.

Overall, the students expressed a lack of desire for increased involvement of their parents in their academics, which may have had to do with the extent to which they viewed their school lives and their home lives as separate. Many of the students reported feeling good at home and having close relationships with their parents and families. In contrast, when they talked about their lives at school, independence was a prominent theme. Perhaps this is to be expected in a cohort of graduating Grade 12 students, many of whom managed jobs, school, and family responsibilities. The students saw themselves and wished to be treated as young adults. They expressed that they saw little benefit to the presence and participation of their parents in parent councils or school activities and were not keen on the idea of parental intrusions into their school and social lives. Some spoke of how other students would simply not give their parents messages about events, checking and deleting the recorded calls left by the school⁵⁴. Jayden freely acknowledged his own deliberate efforts to manipulate his parents by intervening in school communications:

My parents are clueless—I can pretty much tell them anything and they’ll believe me because how would they check? There’s just the ‘late’ calls, but other than that they have

⁵⁴ As data in Chapter 4 revealed, parents may not be as unaware as their children think they are; recall that there are parents who noted that their children sought to intercept or omit messages or information from the school.

no clue. When I was in Grade 9, I lied a couple times and got extra money for a field trip. And once there was a field trip and I just didn't tell them, and I skipped that day.

For some students, decisions about school were made without much consultation with their parents since their parents were unfamiliar with the Canadian school system. Leo described it like this:

...if something happens at school, just have like a very brief discussion about it and that's the last I hear about it, other than that, they leave all my decisions up to me. They don't really know about what goes on here, so they trust me in that way, and they know I like some of the teachers, so if I need help, like picking a course or something, the teachers will help me.

If Jayden acknowledges that he deliberately intercepts or fails to communicate school information to his parents, Leo, in contrast, seems to feel that he can seek out the support he needs to make informed choices and his parents are confident that he is able to make these connections.

Even though this was a very busy group of young people managing many everyday responsibilities and obligations, the students were also keenly aware of their parents' daily struggles, as we have already seen with Caleb and Anil. Some students recognized that they consequently, they needed to be self-driven or to shoulder extra responsibility toward younger family members because their parents were unable to help. The mentorship and support role that siblings, cousins and extended family play are expected to play in many first- and second-generation students' academic success is well-documented in the literature (Delgado, 2023; Kutty, 2014; Patfield, Gore and Fray, 2022; Shahrokni, 2018). Anthony stated:

Like, my mom she works like those long hours, like there's no way she could help and then if she helps, ...I don't think she really can, because first, she's not in school, and she's over forty, so...over time ...our school, education has gotten higher, so I don't think she could help me. But like because she works hard. She expects me to have a life that she didn't have, you know, get a good job, get good grades, stuff like that.

Anthony was unsure that his mom could help him with schoolwork, and he knew she had little time. At the same time, he expressed the idea that his mom, like nearly every parent in this study, expected him to work hard and to achieve upward social mobility. My analysis points back to the ways that children's success, marked by educational attainment, is a family and intergenerational project; everyone had a shared understanding of the goal—children going to university and becoming educated professionals—and different ways they supported that goal. While meritocracy provides language and ideas that are individualistic, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth shows that families can be jointly invested in what appear to be individual goals oriented around the success of their children.

Youth Descriptors of their Community

The final section of this Chapter address some of the youths' comments about the community. This is important because it contradicts many of the parents' comments, detailed in Chapter 4, which characterized the community as safe, nice, and quiet. Chapter 4 also discussed comments from Black parents who pointed to a lack of social cohesion in Brampton. Clearly, there are varied experiences of life in this ethnoburb community. Here, youth who are racialized and male talk about feeling unsafe and about social conflict. I also include a story shared by one youth about anti-Black racism in hiring.

Some of the students answered the questions about community safety by talking about the school being unsafe. Students often noted that the community and the school were different social spaces, and they had different feelings and experiences of safety in each. As this next excerpt shows, Asif felt the surrounding community was relatively safe, but that the school had conflict:

We have a safe community, but that doesn't involve the school itself, so when you put the school into the community, a lot of fights break out between the schools, and that's also a part of the community right. A lot of fights would break out between those two [schools] and there's a problem over things like [social media].

For Asif, the 'school' was part of the community, but stood apart from it when he considered the issue of safety. This seemed to be true of other students too. Often when students expressed that they felt the 'community' was at times unsafe, they would follow up with stories about the school. In contrast, as per the data in Chapter 4, parents never or rarely went to the school, so the goings-on of the school were not part of their lived experience, nor their conception of community. Like their parents, many students felt that the broader community of Brampton was "safe", especially as compared to experiences in Toronto, for instance, but unlike their parents, who did not experience the school on a day-to-day basis, many students experienced the schools as unsafe. Leila said:

...I used to live in apartment buildings in Toronto. And when I used to live there when I was really young, it'd be scary because there was a lot of thefts and violence in our apartment buildings. In the middle of the night you'd hear like banging on your doors. You rarely hear about that stuff in my area [in Brampton] ...like it's that one weird case that happens once a year or something. So like, I feel safe.

In another focus group conversation, Pavan said:

...A big reason people move to Brampton, and you do have a lot of people who moved here from [community] and sometimes originally from [community] and other areas is because it's supposed to be safer.

Pavan's comments speak to the perception that suburbs are 'safe', whether or not that is true.

This section began by pointing to the discrepancies between some of parents and children over the perceptions of, and about, the community. While home ownership and suburban style homes are important to parents, some of the data in this research points to how school is central to 'community' for young people, and how parents experience and think about their lives in this community on different terms than their children.

Inter-Ethnic Relations in Brampton: Student Perspectives

Another important topic that the student data raised is the notion that in a community where many businesses serve specific ethnoracial, religious, or language communities, it can be difficult for people who are not members of those groups to gain employment in these organizations and businesses. Recall that in Chapter 4, I discussed how some Black parents felt that the community lacked a sense of cohesion or closeness, and that some Black parents made comments about South Asians being culturally dominant. Here, Anthony, who is Black, talks about job-seeking at a grocery store that caters to the Chinese community:

Anthony: ... like, me and my friend, my neighbour, we went to apply at [Chinese grocery store franchise], right...

Leo: It's like a supermarket, right...

Interviewer: Oh, supermarket. You and your Chinese friend?

Anthony: Yeah, my Chinese friend. And like [Chinese grocery store franchise] is all Chinese people working there and we applied, like same qualifications, same everything but he got hired and I didn't right, and it's like what the hell because he's Chinese and I'm not? So it sort of leaves that at the back of the head...

Interviewer: I see, I see, that's interesting, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Anthony: If you go in [Chinese grocery store franchise], you're never going to see like a brown guy, a black guy or anyone else working there, just straight Chinese.

Interviewer: I've never even heard of this supermarket...

Leo: Half of them don't even like, speak English...

Pradeep: Yeah, if you go and you ask them like, [popular beverage brand], and you can't understand, they say it in Chinese and you're like, what the hell? I don't know.

In this excerpt, Anthony expresses the opinion that he did not get hired because he is not Chinese, and Leo and Pradeep echo some concerns expressed by parents about Brampton residents who do not speak (or were not speaking, at the time of the interaction) English. These youth were concerned that ethnic-owned businesses limited their chances at gaining employment by only hiring from within their group. Anthony, while not explicitly accusing the store of anti-Black racism, is careful to point out that he and his friend (who was hired) were equally qualified and similar except for their race. As a member of a minority racial group in Brampton, Anthony's job opportunities are limited if ethnic businesses do not hire from outside their group.

Also, it is very possible that anti-Black racism was and is a barrier for Anthony and other young Black people in Brampton seeking employment., Anti-Black (and other kinds of) racism are part of the culture and society we live in; critical race theory has been built on evidence of systemic racism in schools and educational systems where Black children are less likely to obtain

a university diploma (Statistics Canada, 2023), legal systems where Black people face high rates of incarceration (Maynard, 2017), and health care systems in which Black pain is often dismissed (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). Anthony may have been passed over for the job because he is not Chinese, but anti-Black racism is also a relevant consideration.

In the following excerpt from a focus group, a South Asian student is very clear about how his parents' anti-Black sentiments impacted their choice of where to live:

Anil: Um, I lived in Vancouver all my life...

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Anil: Um, biggest difference, there was no Black people there and there were barely any people from the Caribbean area, so especially for my mom I could say that, coming to Toronto and seeing all this even more diversity amongst people, she was really confused. Like she didn't know what to feel. Like I know my mom's definitely afraid of Black people. And then when we were looking for houses here, we almost finalized like about two houses; and then she's like, 'Let's just drive around the neighbourhood a bit'. And then one house, she's like: 'No there's too many Black people here, I don't want to live here' [laughs].

Anil's reference to his mother's fear of Black people is evidence that anti-Black ideas circulate among this community (as would be expected, given they exist everywhere), and that racism may impact families' decisions about where to live, who to associate with, and as Anthony noted previously, who to hire.

These students' concerns point to a lack of strong inter-ethnic relations in the community and about divisions created or reinforced by, for example, the kinds of hiring practice implied by Anthony's story. In this, they echo some of the Black parents' concerns about what they called the

‘cultural dominance’ of some groups (explored in Chapter 4). This indicates that race and ethnicity shape their interpersonal relations and are salient to their lived experiences. Critical race theorists are most interested in the structural and institutional dimensions of race, racism, and racial discrimination. Anthony’s story is one more example of the ways institutional and organizational practices can be racially discriminatory without being explicitly racist. These kinds of racial micro-aggressions and potentially discriminatory behaviour between ethno-racial groups is worthy of further research and theorization by critical race scholars and social researchers.

Summary

The data suggests that while some students sought ways to make choices that did not fit what their parents’ preferences, for some students, the conversations about their education, futures, and wellbeing had positive effects on their sense of self, and sense of love and dedication to their families. This, in turn, helped reinforce these students’ desires and motivations to achieve the high goals set for them.

Overall, student data showed that the students understood their parents’ expectations for them, and that family motivations for their success, rooted in stories of migration for upward social mobility, were powerful influences in their lives. At the same time, some students did not feel that their parents had a very good understanding of the stresses and realities they faced as young people. These stresses included important responsibilities, including financial responsibilities to the family through work and other difficult to manage life circumstances, including managing grief, and school-related pressures, especially to live up to parental and family expectations to succeed, which may be especially acute in households where other family members (siblings, cousins) did not fulfill the immigrant bargain by getting a university education.

Recall that the kinds of stressors faced by the students were quite varied, ranging from financial obligations to parents not being aware of school activities or events. The students, children of a majority group of first-generation parents (16 of the 17 parents), are informed and shaped by what parents said in their interviews about their expectations for their children. While students were convinced their parents were “clueless”, previous data presented in Chapter 4 shows that at least some of them know that their teenagers were trying to manipulate or obscure school messages. In other cases, the differences between the parent’s experience of education in the country of origin and the Canadian school system, combined with heavy work responsibilities and long hours for many parents, may have made the Canadian system less evident for parents to navigate.

Both parents and children’s data reveal that these are parents who are deeply invested in and focused on their children’s educational trajectories. Parents and their children talk about success as the result of hard work and individual efforts, but they also talk about the benefits of education and success accruing to their larger families and communities. By paying attention to race and racialization, inter-ethnic relations in this ‘good’ and ‘multicultural’ community show some cracks – not all parents feel equally included, and students perceive some barriers to work in some ethno-specific businesses. The final Chapter summarizes findings, comments on similarities and differences in parent/student data and will consider how Yosso’s notions of community cultural wealth apply to the findings.

Chapter 6: Intergenerational Narratives, Notions of Success, and Implications for Research

Introduction

This dissertation has investigated how the research participants—a diverse group of racialized, first- and second-generation Canadian families who live in the ethnoburb of Brampton, Ontario—thought about success, as theorized by the author through the lens of critical race theory, critiques of neoliberalism, meritocracy, and multiculturalism, and through consideration of forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

It should be noted that this study did not capture data about social class (unless participants shared information individually); however, the data indicates parents' occupations ranged from professional jobs to work in retail and in the service industry. During informal in-class conversations with the students, I recall hearing stories that countered the typical Canadian narrative that life is better in Canada. The data reveals that there are many kinds of stories, and that stories are complex – some aspects of life (e.g. access to education) may be better in Canada, while other aspects (e.g. community cohesion, language barriers, financial matters) may be more difficult. In field notes, I recorded that some students said that after several challenging years in Canada, their parents wanted to return to their countries of origin. However, this was understood to be a difficult move for their Canadian children, many of whom had lost their non-English language skills. This situation left some families (according to the children) feeling somewhat 'stuck' in Canada.

This final Chapter returns to key themes, concepts, and theoretical frameworks as laid out in Chapters 1 to 5. Throughout this final Chapter, I focus mostly on meta-analyses of social structures and institutions and on what the data might indicate for these families and others like them. I also note the limitations of this study and gesture to topics for further research.

Intergenerational Stories of Sacrifice, as Familial and Aspirational Capital

Most of the parents and children in this research framed their motivations for working toward the children's success as an intergenerational project that would pay off if/when children achieve a higher socioeconomic status than their parents, and/or achieve more/higher level of education than their parents. Success is not limited to educational attainment and class; for both parents and children, success includes ideas about social benefits, family/community good, and often, the pursuit of one's dreams, talents, or personal happiness. This finding supports existing research (Taylor & Krahn, 2013) that shows evidence of shared intergenerational and familial narratives about success in first- and second-generation families. In particular, the sacrifice narrative and the immigrant bargain served as parallel stories that were consistently referenced by the parents and children of the participating families.

These familial aspirations are likely to be common across various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, including White and/or non-immigrant families. However, the unique context of racialized, first- and second-generation Canadians brings an additional layer to these narratives. The challenges and sacrifices associated with migration, along with the influence of Canadian multiculturalism, particularly in ethnoburbs like Brampton, create a distinct backdrop for these aspirations. This research, therefore, employed critical race theory and related approaches to deeply understand these experiences in the specific context of the ethnoburb community and how familial aspirations are formed, shared, maintained and acted on.

As per data explored in Chapters 4 and 5, many parents and children referred to the importance of children doing 'better' than their parents. Some expressed the significance of children being first in their families to complete post-secondary schooling in Canada, and they

shared expectations that children would contribute to their families financially. Stories were shared about the hardships parents endured to provide resources for their children. Overall, familial solidarity and filial obligation is a strong theme. Of course, the sacrifice narrative does not only apply to the experiences of first- and second-generation families; sacrificing for one's children is a somewhat normal part of parenthood. What this research explores is how the children understand their parents' sacrifices and what they do with this knowledge. The immigrant bargain, explored in Chapter 4, focuses more on the uncertainties that come with migration and the potential payoffs that children will accrue because of hardships their parents endured. What is somewhat unique about this research is that both parents and children contributed to the data, allowing for an analysis that brings together these narratives (the sacrifice narrative and immigrant bargain). This research also recognizes the ubiquitous and inescapable context of settler colonialism that informs the social and political structure of communities like Brampton, located on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, who are part of the larger Anishinabek nation. While the study did not directly inquire into this aspect of the community's context, the significant absence of Indigenous presence and representation in these narratives and in the broader community context is noted as a critical oversight, warranting further consideration in understanding the dynamics within such communities.

The immigrant bargain and sacrifice narratives in this study are examples of Yosso's (2005) notions of aspirational and familial capital. Aspirational capital supports families' dreams when families are "often without the objective means to attain those goals" (p. 78). Yosso's (2005) CRT-informed ideas are helpful because of their focus on the "under-utilized assets Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities" (p. 70). For example, parents and children in this study often mentioned their plans for the children to become doctors,

lawyers, or engineers; these dreams are materially unlikely for many families due to the high costs associated with the education required, the competitiveness of professional programs, and many other barriers. Yet, there was little deviation in the families' stories; they were steadfast that the children would go on to university, have families, and be successful – thereby making the parents' hardship and sacrifice worth the effort. Yosso's (2005) concept of aspirational capital is useful in recognizing that the optimistic aspirations of these families were a resource that fueled their sustained efforts.

Familial capital was evidenced by the many cases of shared intergenerational beliefs about the value of education and educational goals among participants (even while there were also differences), which helped reinforce their familial closeness, collective efforts, and communal bonds. These expressed values contrast with the individualistic terms that some students used when talking and writing about how they would achieve their goals, often characterized as attainable through individual 'hard work'. These families were often inclusive of three or more generations, with cousins and aunts/uncles sharing a household, and/or extended family members. In written, spoken, and field-note data, many of the students cited family as one of the most important influences in their lives and spoke of family life in terms of feeling comfortable, safe, and able to be oneself. However, Tina's story in Chapter 5 reminds us that not all students shared this sense of familial closeness. In Tina's case, the death of her father and the circumstances that followed have made it difficult for her to be close with her mother. However, as noted in Chapter 5, many students talked about their feelings of closeness with their family, and how this was a source of strength for them.

Parents' and Children's Views about the Community and Inter-Ethnic Relations

While the parents and children in this study often expressed shared visions of success, some had very divergent experiences of life in the community, and some of the children reported that their parents were largely unaware of these differences. As per data explored in Chapter 5, all the parents reported that they were happy with where they lived in Brampton and thought that the community and Streetsview High were 'good,' pointing to evidence such as the clean, new infrastructure and sparsely populated neighbourhoods.

In contrast, a few of the students, as per comments in the focus groups, did not share their parents' perception that Brampton was a 'good' place to live. Some of the Black parents, too, commented on a lack of positive inter-ethnic community relations between Black people and other, specifically South Asian, people in Brampton. In one story, Anthony recounted that he had difficulty getting hired at an Asian grocery store, and while he framed it as 'not being Chinese', the possibility that anti-Black racism is a barrier to employment is worth serious consideration, especially considering national data pointing to discrimination in employment for Black Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2023). Anil's story, near the end of Chapter 4, revealed that his (non-Black) parents considered proximity to Black people as a negative determining factor in where they chose to live, and that his mother sought to live where she perceived there to be fewer Black residents. The indications of anti-Black racism are not surprising, and a CRT lens demands that the micro-aggressions reported on the data be taken seriously. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the years that have followed this research have seen increased attention paid to anti-Black racism in the Peel District School Board (Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S., 2019). The report highlighted "the absence of demographic diversity amongst school staff and overrepresentation of White teachers at the PDSB (p.4)". In addition to a focus on anti-Black racism, the report also referred to a growing drug

and alcohol problem among some South Asian youth; problems of Islamophobia; anti-Semitism, and other forms of discrimination. In a strongly worded passage, the authors state that:

Myriad of research has confirmed the ongoing challenges experienced by Black Canadians, and although, again, to their credit, the trustees and senior administrators of the PDSB now acknowledge the existence of anti-Black racism, they seemed paralyzed by inaction to effect meaningful change in the lives of Black students... Astonishingly, there has been a historical, collective absence of a call to action to stop the harmful effects of anti-Black racism... (Chadha, E., Herbert, S., & Richard, S., 2019, p.4).

It seems that, as is expected, racism is a constant in the community – this is, as laid out in Chapter 2, the first tenet of critical race theory: racism is endemic to society. The forms of racism that were revealed in the data are unfortunately, an expected, though unwanted part of how society is structured. Critical race theory aims to expose and change deeply entrenched ideas about race, racial hierarchies, dominant culture, and the ways power is distributed in a society, as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. My work is driven by the optimistic belief that social inequity can be reduced. This begins with the clear articulation of social issues, particularly racism, from the perspective of those experiencing inequity, discrimination, or other forms of injustice. By naming racism, documenting people's lived experiences, and engaging in rigorous academic analysis, I hope to contribute to the many necessary efforts to make the aspirations of research participants a more achievable reality.

Meritocracy, Neoliberalism, and Notions of Success

Both parents and children employed similar terms when discussing what constitutes success: they were often focused on jobs, family, future children, careers, and financial stability/wealth as the anticipated outcomes of getting a higher education. Recall that in Chapter

4, most parents said it was important for their children to ‘do better than they did,’ and/or ‘climb the social ladder.’ Rondini’s research (2016), cited in Chapter 2, suggested a link between meritocratic beliefs in parents and the desire to see their children surpass their own accomplishments. As noted in Chapter 1, parents who migrate to another country may experience stagnant or downward social mobility. This phenomenon may explain the resolute focus of these families on investing resources in their children, the next generation, to secure a better future. This study had some stories of downward mobility, but many talked about the opportunities available to their children in Canada that would not have been accessible in other countries, due to a myriad of factors. This perspective seemed to come into play when motivating their children. For example, what was not discussed in Chapter 5 is that some parents reported their sons were doing poorly in school, and they described this in terms of “throwing away opportunity,” being “ungrateful,” or not “understanding what you’ve been given.”

It is worth noting that all the students who were underperforming in school, as per their parents’ interviews, were boys. While gendered experiences of schooling and success were not the focus of this research, it is interesting to consider several indications of sex-differentiated patterns in the data. Both the young men and women talked about the possibilities for men to gain employment without further education: truck driving and construction were often cited examples. This makes sense given Brampton, at the time, had more than its share of employment opportunities related to driving large trucks. Some students also pointed to differences in the type of, and level of, responsibility that boys and girls had in their families. Girls were talked about as being more responsible and as having more household duties. There were also several instances of young men in the study showing evidence of being responsible by, for example, holding part-time jobs or by caring for siblings, cousins, or others in their families. A limitation of this

research is that I did not address sex and/or gender differences and that I relied on presumed gender/sex and did no interrogation for the possibility of non-binary or other gender diversity among participants. A similar study could learn a lot by considering the ways sex and gender impacted these students' interactions with and contributions to their families (and many other aspects of their lives). Data presented in Chapter 2 showed that there is a sex disparity among Black university graduates, with 64% of degrees going to Black women (Brunet, S., & Galarneau, D., 2022) and that the number of Black men going to post-secondary programs has been in decline since 2011 (Do, 2020), so there is existing evidence that at least for Black students, sex differences impact post-secondary attainment.

Overall, the students and their parents held university education to be non-negotiable and a goal worth considerable effort and sacrifice to achieve. Notably, there was little evidence of conflict between parents and children on this matter, though there were negotiations between parents and their children about post-secondary choices and direction. Evidence in this study suggests that some children made efforts to avoid conflict with their parents over programs of study and future careers, though some of the students sought out non-confrontational ways to follow their own choices. One example is Sabia in Chapter 4. She avoided taking science courses without telling her parents. I found that these students and their parents were oriented toward careers that were perceived to lead to high potential earnings, professionalization, and high status.

According to the City of Brampton (2019a), over 24% of residents over 15 years of age have attained a bachelor's degree, and the most popular fields of study in post-secondary education are "business, management, and public administration" followed by "architecture, engineering, and related technologies" (City of Brampton, 2019a). Of the careers these families

aspired to, ‘doctor, lawyer, engineer,’ , medical and law programs are not listed among these, and given the competitive nature of admission to programs in these fields, this is to be expected. It is interesting and would perhaps be encouraging for these families to note however that ‘engineering’ is indeed listed in the second list of most-popular fields of study, perhaps an indication that students are achieving in this area. Our research project did not track post-secondary outcomes, so it is unclear how many of the students became the doctors or lawyers their parents hoped they would become. As a research assistant in the classroom, I observed that most of the student participants were admitted to a university program, but it is fair to assume that at least some had to modify their career plans; no cohort is likely to have a majority of doctors and lawyers!

This research highlights the significant role that educational aspirations and cultural values play in shaping the experiences of migrant families in Canada. Yet, Canada is not a meritocracy. While the aspirations of these families are commendable, the realities of Canada's socio-economic landscape suggest that meritocracy is more of an ideal than a practical truth. Study after study show that the primary factors predicting high earnings and high educational outcomes have remained the same for decades: parental levels of education and socioeconomic status are significant predictors of educational attainment in Canada (Caro et al., 2009; Fransoo et al., 2005; Pathways to Education, 2020; Uppal, 2017). The persistent influence of these factors on educational and career outcomes calls for a critical examination of systemic barriers to achievement for some groups. This study, therefore, not only sheds light on the hopes and struggles of first- and second-generation Canadian families but also invites a broader discussion on how policies and educational institutions might address the needs of these families, who are a significant and growing cohort of Canadians.

Contribution to Critical Race Theory Scholarship

Critical race theorists care deeply about patterns of racial inequity that are embedded in social structures, for example, school curricula and schooling cultures. One of the driving impetuses of my research was an interest in whether neoliberal success narratives and meritocratic beliefs mask the ways that some racialized people lack decision-making power or access to resources and/or opportunities in their communities. As Anthony's story of possible employment discrimination shows, people of colour recognize that there are structural forces at play in their lives, but dominant discourses emphasizing individual hard work may hinder their ability to articulate these insights. Additionally, these narratives of individual effort and reward fail to encompass the familial, community, and societal aspirations these young people hold, which include giving back to their families, helping others, and contributing to society. As a sociologist informed by critical race theory, I find it troublesome that these young people were so limited in the ways they expressed their understandings of how society works, and I wondered if they are equally encouraged to critically think about larger social phenomena that may put up barriers to their success, from rising costs of schooling, to available jobs, and to the cultural and social dimensions of 'making it' in university and beyond. I also question whether these individuals believe that their communities can influence the forces that shape the barriers they encounter. Additionally, I wonder if the lack of social or political critique in their narratives is a means of sustaining the 'culture of possibility' (Yosso, 2005) that is so prevalent in the stories shared by these families.

As discussed in previous chapters, numerous factors influence the educational success of children with migration backgrounds in Canada, extending beyond just socioeconomic factors (Cheng & Yan, 2018; Corak, 2011; Garnett et al., 2008). Nevertheless, studies show that the

children of first-generation Canadians attain post-secondary education at an equal or higher rate than children of Canadian-born parents. In this analysis, I have focused on showing how community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) may be an important factor in how well many of these first- and second-generation students⁵⁵ have done in high school and expressed a rationale for why this may continue through university.

When the potential future success of these students is considered in a larger social context, the certainty of upward social mobility is not so clear. Research shows that students in Canada have steadily increased the amount of debt they take on to attend post-secondary schooling (Statistics Canada, 2019b); Ontario tuition fees have increased steadily (Statistics Canada, 2021a) but inequitably, with poorer families taking on relatively larger debts (Macdonald & Shaker, 2011). In a neoliberal capitalist economy, post-secondary access has grown, but funding to support tuition costs has shrunk. As a result, most qualified students can attend, but must pay for it through loans. Further, rising costs have meant that the professional programs that these families aspire to are increasingly out of reach for non-affluent families (Barakat, 2023). These larger social and economic trends may mean that university education is attainable, but the cost may mean upward social mobility is made more challenging.

For these families, as I have previously stated, the matter of the children attending university was settled; they were going. The potential implications of this are interesting to consider and could be the focus on future research. What happens to the strong filial and familial obligations as these students grow, leave home in some cases, and take up post-secondary

⁵⁵ There were several boys in the cohort of students who were underperforming academically, despite being students in the same university-streamed course at Streetsview, and despite sharing many similarities with their peers. This study cannot explain why these individuals were struggling, but it is of note that they were all boys, and they also were students who were less engaged with me interpersonally when I was in the class, so I do not have any field notes or other data that might help explain their situation.

education? This question would be important to take up with first- and second-generation families in Canada, to whom education is so important and so central to the family story.

Brampton is a racialized space with a notable absence of White people. Brampton's demographics are representative of the Canadian dream of multiculturalism, with a majority non-White population, various houses of worship, and local businesses that sustain ethnic community life. But Brampton is not removed from the larger national context of settler colonialism, and inequitable power relations are embedded in its institutions. Though few White people live in Brampton, it has never had a non-White mayor, and White people are overrepresented among school leadership and members of city council. Nevertheless, Siemiatycki and Matheson's (2005) research shows that South Asian Canadians are increasingly winning in electoral politics in the Greater Toronto Area, which includes Brampton. Social justice, however, entails more than mere representation. The data presented in this dissertation suggests that the upcoming generation of Canadians, while holding an optimistic view of success, might be inadequately prepared to discuss various forms of inequity they encounter, often resorting to individualistic explanations; this despite their goals of being distinctly non-individualistic and family oriented.

CRT-informed community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) is an important tool for advancing contemporary discussions about how first- and second-generation youth of colour seek to make their lives in Canada. It recognizes the power of strengths-based and culturally aligned family and community narratives that frame how families talk about their sacrifices and struggles—with optimism and positivity, and as powerful motivators that will lead to better lives for them all. I began this dissertation with a commitment to the practice of privileging the voices of racialized people in CRT-informed research and scholarship, including all the contradictions, exceptions, absences, and complexities. As I engaged with the students and immersed myself in

the school environment over the course of a year, I was profoundly moved by the wealth of resources - both tangible, such as time, money, and familial energy, and intangible, like the forms community cultural wealth referenced by Yosso (2005) - that these students and their families could harness in their efforts to reach their goals. By contextualizing this data using Yosso's (2005) concepts of familial and aspirational capital, it becomes clear that these racialized youth have high aspirations despite the challenges and barriers they face. More significant, the barriers they face are reframed as sacrifice, so that if obstacles do not disappear, they are potentially transformed in familial talk, and into a motivating factor.

Summary

Chapter 6 of this dissertation has revisited key themes and theoretical frameworks discussed in earlier chapters, focusing on intergenerational narratives of success among racialized first- and second-generation Canadian families in Brampton. It explored how these families frame success beyond mere educational and economic achievements, encompassing broader social and familial aspirations, and influenced by their unique migration experiences. The chapter also highlights Canadian settler colonialism as a significant structural force and acknowledges the noticeable lack of Indigenous presence, both in the data and within the school and community settings that informed this research. Furthermore, it examined the contrast between parents' and children's perceptions of community and inter-ethnic relations in Brampton, highlighting instances of tension and discrimination. The chapter concluded by discussing the implications of these findings for critical race theory and future research.

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Appendix A: Complete Description of the Sharing Experiences Project

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community

Proposal Summary: The York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC) is proposing a major knowledge mobilization project whereby the results of research conducted with marginalized youth in Toronto's inner city and inner suburban educational milieux can be shared with educators, community and other stakeholders in the outer suburban districts of the Greater Toronto Area.

This program of knowledge transfer/mobilization is based on members of the York's Faculty of Education many years experience in conducting action research in Toronto's inner and inner suburban school and community settings, including the Jane-Finch Corridor, Jane and Falstaff, Malvern, Parkdale, and Regent Park. We see relevance in communicating with educators and human service workers in outer suburban communities about our experiences and research findings about the alienation and disengagement of new migrants and ethno-racial minority youth who are now moving with their families from Toronto's inner city and inner-suburban neighbourhoods to the outer suburbs such as Peel, Brampton, Vaughan, Markham, Ajax, and Pickering. The impact of this out-migration into such areas is providing new challenges, both for the young people and their parents, as well as educators of the receiving schools.

A major YCEC project from which we will draw information is a current partnership project with the Toronto District School Board, entitled *School and Community Engaged Education*. The project brings educators in some of Toronto's low income, racially diverse, immigrant neighbourhoods into conversations with parents, community leaders, representatives of community and social service agencies, representatives of government and other partners to help make education more inclusive and responsive to the needs, interests and aspiration of students and their parents thereby improving students' school engagement and retention.

YCEC is proposing a series of "Conversations in Education." These will involve multiple stakeholders – educators and educational administrators, parents, social/human service workers, community members and others – in focused discussions about contemporary issues and challenges in education and community affected by changing societal, economic, demographic and other factors that influence teaching and learning. These Conversations would take place in the three districts particularly affected by the in-migration: Durham Region, York Region and Peel, all satellite suburban areas on the outskirts of Toronto. This programme will help inform and mobilize the receiving outer suburbs communities of our understandings and strategies that have worked to enhance student and parental engagement and increase students' achievement retention through inclusive, culturally relevant curriculum and educational programme.

Knowledge-sharing strategies include a web-based communications hub to disseminate both existing research data and the results of each Conversation in Education. Blogging and a variety of social networking tools such as Twitter will enable participants to deepen and broaden their collaborative efforts outside the confines of organized meetings. Evaluation will be an on-going process and the project will culminate in the development and dissemination of a Resource Materials for elementary and secondary schools, community centres, and social service agencies working with youth in the regions. A final Learning Institute will be the culminating activity for *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community*.

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

Outreach Proposal:

Intellectual, economic and social impact: *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* is a major knowledge mobilization project designed to help meet the challenges facing outer suburban districts into which inner city and inner suburban Toronto families are moving. The purpose is to enable student engagement, achievement and retention in their new school and community settings. In consultation with the stakeholders, faculty members and researchers involved in *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* will move forward by producing and disseminating the knowledge gained through the pedagogical and community-based research in which York's Faculty of Education has long been engaged. An important priority is to give attention to the potential contribution of critical place-based education (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008) as a framework for thinking about a curriculum and pedagogy of engagement for outer-suburban schools and communities.

Recognizing the intricate links that exist between schools and the communities, the results of existing research will be provided in forms useful and accessible to teachers, learners, parents, social/human service workers, community leaders, educational policymakers and planners, and other stakeholders in the three receiving outer suburban areas of Toronto – Peel, York and Durham. A major goal of the project will also be to help build, support and facilitate links and relationships among all stakeholders that will contribute to the educational success and social welfare of young people as they adjust to their "outer suburban" contexts.

The parents of these youth are moving to neighbourhoods, such as Brampton, Woodbridge, Markham, Pickering and Ajax in the three regions, in an effort to escape the inner city and inner suburban settings in which they have been raising their children. Research has indicated that many of the migrating families are immigrants to Canada – many of them recent non-European newcomers who go directly to the outer suburbs with the hope of the opportunities that the area might provide (James & Saul, 2009; Logan, 2003; Preston & Wong, 2002; Troper 2003). Families moving from the inner city and inner suburbs are often coming from districts described by Wacquant (2008, p. 1) as "territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from and shunned because they are – or such is their reputation, but these matters perception contributes powerfully to fascinating reality – hotbeds of violence, vice and social dissolution." Therefore, for the purposes of this project we begin from the assumption that schools, and by implication teachers, have a responsibility to find ways to engage with these new members of the communities and to work with parents, and social service providers to develop strategies and action plans that will address the social needs and educational aspirations of the parents thereby giving attention to the reasons and opportunities for which the parents moved into these suburban communities (Dippo & James 2009).

Insofar as teachers tend to be "outsiders" to (or not residents of) the communities in which they teach (Dippo & James, 2009), it is appropriate that opportunities be provided for them gain an understanding of their students' lived experiences with things such as immigration, poverty; racialization, alienating and discriminatory practices and pedagogy; and lack of adequate resources. According to Toronto District School Board (TDSB) educators can benefit from facilitated discussion between themselves, parents and community members (TDSB 2008, 22; 31, see also 2005; 2008a; 2008b). And as noted urban education scholar, Jean Anyon (1994) has long argued, school effectiveness requires teachers to work alongside community members to improve the day-to-day life of the community. Therefore an important goal of the proposed project is to help familiarize educators and those they serve with one another. Bringing social service agencies, community organizations, parents, educators and other stakeholders together offers unique insights into the multiple factors that contribute to the experience of youth. Indeed, community-based organizations (ethnocultural, recreational, economic, educational and environmental) have long been interested in establishing

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

mutual and productive relations with public schools in order to more effectively work with young people and their families.

The research to be disseminated is that which York University's Faculty of Education, through its School/Board and community partnerships, has been conducting with Toronto area schools and communities (in the inner city and inner suburbs), over a period of nearly twenty years. In this case the results of scholarly and action research projects will be shared with teachers, parents, students, community and social service agencies and other stakeholders for the benefit of the destination communities in outer suburban areas, into which families from neighbourhoods such as Jane-Finch and Malvern are moving.

Of particular relevance to this proposal is the York Centre for Education and Community's current three-year partnership project with the Toronto District School Board. Entitled *School and Community Engaged Education* (SCEE). This was designed to explore methods and approaches that encourage student academic achievement. Central to the project, which works directly with schools in Jane-Finch and nearby neighbourhoods, is a series of workshops, parent engagement sessions, professional development opportunities and an annual Summer Institute to discuss the need for building an inclusive and relevant curriculum. The SCEE Project, which started in September 2008, is meant to enhance students' school experience and, in turn, their academic achievement through more inclusive and culturally relevant educational programs. The SCEE project has provided substantial research results appropriate for sharing with outer suburban educators, parents, community and social service agencies, indeed, any group or individual concerned with reducing the sense of alienation many young people experience, especially in situations where race and ethnicity are factors.

Another important project of York's Faculty of Education with which YCEC is affiliated is the York-Westview Project, now in its seventeenth year. Partners in this project include the York University Faculty Association, Seneca College, Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and private donors. Operating in twenty-three schools in Jane and Finch community, it offers programs and activities that promote inclusivity and equity in public education through increasing access to post-secondary opportunities for first generation students in the university neighbourhood. Eleven major programs target students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12, encouraging them to pursue post-secondary education or training. An Advanced Credit Experience Program (ACE) provides a post-secondary education experience to high school students from a diversity of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a supportive environment.

Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community is designed to help bring about needed and relevant educational policies and practices that will provide the kind of knowledge and understanding of community life that becomes the grounds for fostering an environment where genuinely inclusive and community engaged education takes place. An important objective of the proposed project is to support schools in integrating the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of all community members, thereby improving marginalized young people's participation and achievement in schools and communities. This inclusive approach to curriculum and pedagogy is dependent on an understanding of community life which can only be achieved through community engagement. Ultimately, the program will mobilize understandings and strategies for all involved in the schooling and education of young people, in an effort to ensure student engagement, success and retention in the outer suburban receiving communities into which Toronto's inner city and inner suburban families are moving.

The York Centre for Education and Community is designed to support teaching and learning that is appropriate to the diverse needs of communities and particularly youth, considerate of their cultural experiences, and supportive of their aspirations. Generally, projects in which the Faculty of Education at York University are involved, demonstrate a commitment to education in terms of a as worldview characterized by hope and desire, by an interest in addressing difficult questions and issues,

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

and an understanding that teaching and learning, as well as knowledge production and knowledge dissemination are inextricably related. Education is understood to encompass both traditional schooling, and a process that takes place within the private and public spaces, ranging from homes, recreational facilities, community centres, and other places that make up a young person's experience of community. Community collaborations for the sake of education can serve to strengthen social and cultural capital in receiving communities, thereby enabling schools and teachers to become important players in initiating and/or supporting social, political, and economic changes aimed at addressing systemic racism and poverty (Warren 2005; Gillborn 2005).

As a result of this project, we anticipate that more parents and community members in the schools volunteering (in classrooms, in the library, at sporting events) working in paid positions (E.A.s, lunchroom supervisors, playground supervisors), running after-school programs (arts, sports, clubs, sports), taking courses (ESL, bridging), and participating on school councils and other advisory boards. It is also expected that projects such as this one will result in increased participation by educators; parents and others involved in teaching and learning in community events, and in community-based organizations. This range of contacts will support the development of productive and enduring relations between community groups and agencies, professional educators, schools, communities, parents and other stakeholders

Capacity: The York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC) is a faculty-based Organized Research Unit, and the first ORU to be established within York's Faculty of Education. The YCEC was established in order to facilitate creative collaborative research and program partnerships which explore and strengthen the intricate links that exist between education and community. The results of such research are expected to influence public policy, leading to improved relations between educators, students, parents, community organizations and relevant government agencies. YCEC Research Associates, Research Partners, teacher secondees, and graduate students provide a unique and extensive resource base for the development of innovative collaborative projects with multiple partners who are concerned with student success and with community engagement in teaching and learning.

Co-applicants for this funding are Drs. Carl James and Don Dippo. Carl James, Director of the YCEC, is widely published in the sociology of education and is leading scholar in the study of urban/suburban society, especially as it influences the lives of alienated youth. Under his leadership, the YCEC undertook the groundbreaking three-year partnership with the Toronto District School Board, entitled *School and Community Engaged Education*. This was initiated in response to the 2007 discussions pertaining to the schooling issues of minority students at the Toronto District School Board, including the 40% drop-out rate amongst students of African descent – something which The Royal Commission on Learning had suggested earlier was related to the sense of alienation experienced by the young members of the African Diaspora in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994). The SCEE project is taking place in four northwestern Toronto schools and includes research to identify and assess current educational activities, noting what is working; professional development for teachers about inclusiveness in the curriculum; mentoring and achievement counseling for students; discussion groups and other measures designed to engage parents and community members; programs that will link teachers with community groups in the areas they serve; and mechanisms designed to share the knowledge gained with other schools. A fifth school with a significant Aboriginal population has recently been added.

Dr. Don Dippo is the Associate Dean of Preservice and a former elementary school teacher. One aspect of his current research is the *Master of Education Pilot Project at Firgrove Public School* which brings together teachers and principals, settlement workers, employment councilors, recreation and healthcare professionals, parents, and community activists who work in urban and suburban communities to meet, study, and learn together. The program addresses academic and professional development needs of members of local school staff and community organizations. He provides

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

significant leadership both within York's Faculty of Education and in the larger community in the drive to develop effective relationships between teachers, community members, and engage them in ongoing conversations.

The YCEC Executive Committee is composed of senior York faculty members. Program development is guided by an Advisory Council made up of leading individuals in education, law, social service, media, social work, and a host of other fields relevant to the Centre's mandate. There are senior educators from the Durham, York Region and Peel Regional Boards of Education on the YCEC Advisory Council. Attached are several letters of support attesting to the close ties that exist between educators in receiving communities, York Faculty of Education, and in particular, YCEC.

Research conducted by and through the YCEC examines the relationship between education and community, and explores communities' issues and concerns related to schooling. The objective is to help make education more responsive to the needs of the people it serves, as well as more reflective of the values and aspirations of the communities of which they are a part. The culminating activities of YCEC projects include regular "Conversations in Education," which bring together educators, faculty members, community leaders and organizations, and social service/government agencies to discuss current (or pressing) issues in education. These serve as the model on which this new project is based. The Centre's website includes podcasted panel discussions from a variety of school, community and social service group meetings relevant to its mandate; as well articles, news items and live-streamed video presentations are planned for future conferences and seminars. Another means for knowledge mobilization is the very successful series of Teacher Institutes; Community Engagement Meetings; and Parent Engagement Programs that have been operated by YCEC since its inception.
<http://www.yorku.ca/yfile/archive/index.asp?Article=13174>

The YCEC builds on many years of experience by York University's Faculty of Education in the development of new ways for faculty members, teacher candidates, professional educators, social service providers, health care workers, artists, administrators, parents, and community activists, to come together for the purposes of knowledge mobilization. The principles and themes that infuse the Faculty's programs include equity, diversity, community, collaboration, interdisciplinarity and social justice; these values are evident in the many forms of community engaged education in which the faculty members and more than 6,000 students participate.

York University's Centre for Education and Community works collaboratively with, and has access to, a large number of internal experts and resources to help make *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* highly successful. These include the Advanced Broadband Enabled Learning (ABEL) Program and the Knowledge Mobilization Unit, both leaders in the development of mechanisms for sharing knowledge.

ABEL's proven experience in bringing people and organizations together virtually will connect and increase the efficacy of the relationship and association building, and support the development of interactive mechanisms to increase knowledge mobilization within the project. The project's activity will be supported both in real-time and asynchronously thereby creating dynamic opportunities for knowledge exchange and impact. Leveraging collaborative technologies, videoconferencing services and web-based services (podcasting, blogs, streamed media, wikis) ABEL will provide access to communication sites supported by broadband connectivity and state-of-the-art ICT that will result in collaborative experiences that range from multi-user distance meetings and workshops to local, national, and international partners, to online forums, and web-streaming.

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit research is specifically designed to mobilize in new and innovative ways scholarly research in disciplines such as social sciences and humanities – research that can have a profound impact on shaping public policy and professional practice. The KM Unit at York is one of two such units in the country; in conjunction with the University of Victoria, York's KM Unit has created ResearchImpact, Canada's emerging KM network.

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

Knowledge Mobilization Plan: *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* is designed to share knowledge with a wide range of community and educational partners in three target districts of the Greater Toronto Area. Since Durham, York Region and Peel are experiencing increasing in-migration of families with school-aged children from inner city and inner suburban neighbourhoods of the City of Toronto, it is valuable that information from educational and community-based research conducted within those neighbourhoods now be shared with individuals and organizations working in public and community-based learning institutions, social service agencies and receiving communities. This project is supported by the results of long-established action research collaborations with TDSB and teacher education activities in these three districts' school boards and our connections with a number of community partners in these areas. Our work will also be supported by graduate and undergraduate students, teacher candidates, secondees from various district school boards, and faculty members and researchers from York University.

Accordingly, the York Centre for Education and Community has developed an ambitious and efficient plan for knowledge mobilization. A new website designed for print, audio and video will be developed to serve as a communications hub for *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community*. It will include video live-streaming capability; RSS feeds; blogs, Twitter and other social networking; and an archive of articles and other media for sharing with project participants in particular, and indeed, with the general public as well, as this will be an open-access site. It is expected that the initial design of the website will be carried out in June, 2010 or as soon as funds are made available, should this application be successful.

Based on the Faculty of Education long-standing relationships with the Durham Region, York Region and Peel Regional Boards of Education, the YCEC will initiate a series of "Conversations in Education" to bring together community members, parents, educators and educational administrators, local organizations, and representatives of social service and government agencies, to discuss issues in teaching and learning in the new suburban reality. Each Conversation will focus on a different issue; these may range from a sense of alienation experienced by racialized youth; best practices for inclusive education; the roots of youth disengagement (or drop out) from school; strategies for encouraging student engagement and success; community-school relationships; parent engagement and a host of other methods and strategies designed to help students succeed.

"Conversations in Education" will take place monthly throughout the academic year, so there will be 8 meetings over the 12-month life of the project in each of the regions, for a total of 24 "Conversations in Education." Each will have a 3-4 person panel moderated by a Research Associate of the YCEC; a member of the York Faculty of Education; or by a special guest with expertise in the particular topic at hand. Conversations will be recorded for podcasting through the project website, where they will be archived. This archive will represent a significant resource in and of itself, and will be maintained by the York Centre for Education on the Faculty of Education servers for years to come, ensuring the sustainability of the knowledge sharing inherent in the proposed project. The Conversations will begin in September and continue through April, 2011.

The culminating activity for the project will be a Learning Institute to be held in June, 2012 to share the results of the Conversations, and to discuss next steps for continuing the dialogue initiated during this one-year project. A final product will be a *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* Resource containing summarized results of each Conversation in Education; the results of the evaluations; and recommendations for improved knowledge mobilization strategies in future collaborative endeavors. This will be produced in the last two months of the project, and be made generally available in both print and on-line downloadable form. It is intended that 5,000 copies will be printed so as to provide hardcopies to stakeholders in all three target districts, as well as to the more general academic and research communities.

Carl E. James and Don Dippo

The York Centre for Education and Community will commit to maintaining the *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* website for the foreseeable future, utilizing space on the York University Faculty of Education servers and with the support of staff, the ABEL program personnel, and graduate students.

Evaluation and Reporting: Evaluation instruments will be developed in the first stages of the project (over the summer of 2010) and will be distributed in the first Conversation in Education to be held in September of the same year. Researchers will elicit feedback from participants as to the design and appropriateness of the questions, and make recommendations for improving the evaluative instrument. A revised evaluation questionnaire based on these recommendations will be administered at each subsequent "Conversation in Education," and the results will be tabulated for use in future knowledge mobilization projects; for further action research projects undertaken by the York Faculty of Education; and for reporting to participants in each of the three communities engaged in the project, and to SSHRC as part of the final grant report.

The Learning Institute to take place in the summer of 2011 will include an overall evaluation of the *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* project. This will be both verbal and in the form of an Evaluation Questionnaire. These results will also be tabulated for reporting to participants in each of the three communities engaged in the project, and to SSHRC as part of the final grant report.

Student Training: Students are involved at all stages of the work. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Drs. James and Dippo and coordinated by a PhD student in the Faculty of Education, while the knowledge mobilization program will be managed by a second PhD student. Each MA-level Research Assistant will be directly responsible for managing the Conversations in Education, including preliminary and follow-up materials development and dissemination, for one of the three target areas, and two work-study students (undergraduate) will undertake support and liaison duties. It is proposed that a Research Associate with a doctorate in education, the sociology of education or related field be provided for student training and to oversee the day-to-day operations, as the liaison, evaluation and community engagement aspects of the project will require sustained attention, which graduate students employed for 10 hours per week each may find difficult to provide.

Reporting: The results of *Sharing Experiences: Conversations in Urban/Suburban Education and Community* will be reported in a timely fashion to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada according to the requirements set forth in the grant agreement, and with respect to professional and scholarly standards therefore.

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Carl E. James and Don Dippo

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Appendix B: Instructions for Final Reflection Assignment to Students (What Is Success)

Final assignment - Reflection

Your assignment is to write at least 2 pages (double-spaced, approximately 500 words) reflecting on the following questions. The overall goal is for you to think back on your high school experiences and on what you've learned about schooling and the value of education, as well as your challenges or the things that help you to reach your goals.

You should write clearly and show creativity and careful thought in your reflection. You will be graded on:

- clarity of the writing
- creativity and completeness of your answers
- thoughtfulness of your responses
- organizing your essay into clear paragraphs

You should endeavor to use as many examples as possible in your paper, and to give as much detail as possible.

QUESTIONS TO USE:

Thinking back about your high school experience so far, what aspects of high school life have been your favorites? What has been the most difficult part of high school?

Did you hold any paid jobs in high school? What was it, and how many hours a week do/did you work?

What are your plans for the summer? (Work, summer school, no plans...)

What are your plans for September 2013? (Attending college or university program, continuing in high school)

Is it important for you to attend college or university? Why do you think it matters? What difference will it make in your life? In your family's life?

What program do you hope to attend and why? What is it about this program that appeals to you? Why do you think you would be a good fit for this program?

When did you start thinking about college/university?

What kinds of messages or lessons have your parents/family taught you about college/university?

What aspects of college/university are you most worried about?

How are you planning to pay for your tuition?

Are you planning on being employed during college/university? Only in the summer or year-round? What kind of work do you hope to have?

When you were interviewing your parent(s) for this assignment, was there anything they said that surprised you? Did you learn anything new? What was the most interesting thing you remember about the interview?

Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions Asked by Students

Interview Date:

Your name:

Who are you interviewing?

Where are you conducting the interview?

Where did they go to school?

Do you live in Brampton? Yes/No. If no, where do you live?

Is this interview in another language (not English)? If yes, what language?

Who do you go to for information about schooling/education?

Who do you go to most often for help with your schoolwork?

About parents: their schooling and education

1. Tell me about your first school. Where was it? What do you remember about it?
2. Tell me about your high school? Where was it? Did you like it? Did it lead you to a specific job?
3. Overall, were you a good student? Why/why not?
4. What were your high school teachers like, and what do you remember most about them?
5. When you were a student, what did you think you would do when you finished school?
6. Did you go to college/university? If so, where, and what did you study?
7. Do you think your college/university experience was a good one? Why/why not?
8. If you went to school outside of Canada: what are some of the differences between school in Canada and elsewhere?

About the School (Streetsview):

1. What do you think of my school?
2. How many times have you been to my school, and what was it for?

1. Do you think the school does a good job of keeping you up to date about how I'm doing? Is there anything you wish they did differently?
2. What do you expect me to get from my high school education (prompts: job? More education?)
3. What do you hope I do after high school?
4. What do you think are my biggest challenges to reaching my goals in school?
5. How important is my education to you and to our family? Why?

About the community:

1. Do you think we live in a good community? Why?
2. Do you think there are any problems/challenges in our community, and what are they?
3. Do you think our school is part of our community? How/why?

Appendix D: Focus Group Questions and Prompts

Focus Group Questions

Set up: These focus groups were done in groups of 4-5 students of the same gender, with a facilitator (graduate student) of the same gender. In other words, the boys and girls were in separate focus groups. Each focus group went 90mins, which was the length of the class. We could not go on longer, and some needed more time. These focus groups were completed following interviews where each student interviewed their parents. The interview focused on the parents' own schooling experiences, their understandings of their childrens' educational experiences, and their life in a suburban community).

1. In the interviews, almost all of the parents said that they like this community, and they think it's a good place to live. Specifically, they talked about community safety, and also about multiculturalism, as some of the reasons the community is 'good'. Do you agree with them - is this a 'safe' community? Is multiculturalism 'good'?

(Prompts: What does 'multiculturalism' mean? Are there any racial/ethnic tensions or stereotypes in the community?)

2. What, if any, are the challenges of growing up in this community?

3. What is the best and worst thing about this school?

4. What were the most important skills, habits or ideas that you have gained, in or out of school, in the past few years?

5. In the interviews, there were some clear differences between the boys and the girls in their responses. We observed that the girls are more likely to be applying themselves in their school work, they are more likely to obey their parents, and they are more likely to apply to college/university. What do you think are the reasons that the boys are not doing the same?

(Prompts: in terms of academic achievement, behaviour, contribution to the community, social relations)

6. How well do you think your parents understand your life at school?

(Prompts: do parents understand the way schools operate, social life in school? If they lack knowledge, what do you think they're misinformed or under-informed about? Where do they get their information from? How often do they come to the school? How often do you talk about school with them?)

7. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? In 10 years?

