

Accessing Privilege: Teachers' Experiences in Elite Private Schools

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## Abstract

Schools serve as a site of investigation for social reproduction, often with a lens on marginalized communities to elucidate how inequity and class disparities are actualized. Comparatively, there has been less access to private schools for researchers, and therefore, fewer studies that focus on the role of upper-class communities in maintaining these structures. This study explores the elite private school environment to come to an awareness of how privileged self-understandings are created in these institutions via educators' perspectives. Privileged dispositions can be a barrier to building an equitable world as they are oriented toward self-fulfillment, often with little regard for one's impact on others. Focusing on the experiences of teachers broadens existing research and creates space to think about the implicit and explicit ways educators relate to privilege for the purpose of critical reflection and change.

Two questions frame this endeavour: How do teachers working in elite private schools perceive and negotiate privilege in various spaces? Secondly, how might teachers' experiences engender privilege or how might they challenge it in their everyday practices? This study explored these questions through a series of three in-depth interviews with eight middle and secondary educators in southern Ontario with varying degrees of experience in elite private schools. Using an iterative, thematic, and intersectional approach to data analysis, this study arrives at patterns of how privileged self-conceptions are formed, reinforced, and areas in which there are attempts to challenge them. Ultimately, this study finds that despite teachers' attempts to confront privilege, they take part in reinforcing privileged self-understandings of their students. Educators feel they can teach about the topic but are limited in the extent they can challenge the privilege that pertains to students or parents. As well, teachers adopt their own privileged self-understanding and perpetuate exclusion based on race, gender, sexual orientation,

and linguistic differences. These factors shape how they conceive of their responsibility and work as teachers in relation to students and colleagues. In making these distinctions, it becomes clearer what hidden discourses shape teachers' experiences, who is most implicated by these narratives, and the power dynamics that exist in elite spaces.

*Key Words:* Elite Private Schools, Elite Schooling, Class Reproduction, Teachers' Experiences, Privilege, Entitlement, Privileged Self-Understandings, Middle School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers

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Education is a gift. So much richness comes when we recognize a gift's complexity, when we realize that there is so much behind each person and encounter in educational spaces: our families, friendships, the teachers before us, love, heartache and pain, obstacles and joys, and those things simply unbeknownst to us. When there is an awareness that what we see is just the tip of the iceberg, the gift becomes so much more, and consequently, so does our gratitude for that gift. When we embrace educational experiences as entities that transcend the human experiences of here and now, as something beyond temporal interactions, that is when they truly touch the soul, and our sense of gratitude becomes as infinite as the experiences and people connected to our community. Although I will acknowledge some of the important people who have made this pursuit possible, I am aware that I have much to be thankful for that is beyond what I can perceive and know. Each person that has helped me on this journey is a rich tapestry of experiences, and so by extension, I am also grateful for all the things that have made each of them who they are.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale & Statement of the Problem: Why Focus on Teachers in Elite Private Schools?**

Education is marked with the task of social change. Educational studies ask how we can create citizens and leaders rooted in equitable practices. Public curricula and school programming are often the first areas addressed when imagining this shift, however, in this qualitative study, I look elsewhere to answer this question. Rather than look to those areas, this dissertation explores teachers' experiences in the elite private education system to think about both the implicit and explicit ways privilege can take expression, as these realities often move students and teachers further away from becoming the transformative leaders of tomorrow (Burkholder, 2011; Giroux, 1992; Peshkin, 2001).

There is a well-established body of literature that identifies schools as sites of social disparity. Researchers have posited that the education system plays a salient role in class reproduction; that is, it is a site that perpetuates inequality and disadvantage in terms of opportunity and achievement for lower-income and racialized students (Apple, 1982, 1995; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Willis, 1981; Youdell, 2011). The conditions of marginalized communities have been the primary focus when aiming to transform inequitable experiences in schools, however, this focus has created an imbalance, thereby providing less insight into the ways dominant groups maintain class structures. When thinking about social change, it is vital to come to know the powers of upper-class realities, because by naming them, there is an opportunity to disrupt them. Researchers have recently begun to address this discrepancy more significantly and thus, there is a developing body of work centred on upper-middle class and affluent school culture and the mechanisms by which the privileges of social

class are maintained (Anyon, 1980,1981; Brantlinger, 2007; Demerath, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a, 2013; Kahn, 2011; Reay, 2013). Furthermore, literature focused specifically on elite private schools, with the exception of a limited few (for example, see Variyan, 2018, 2019a; Pinto-Dror & Shoshana, 2022), typically view teachers as a means to access students and families or to understand the culture of the school, broadly speaking. In this area of scholarship, for example, teachers are depicted as showing a commitment to the institutions to which they belong (Kahn, 2011). Similarly, “deep-bonding” has been described as a salient feature of student-teacher relationships (Gaztambide- Fernández, 2009a), and teachers represented in these studies often have a sense of pride and positive feelings toward being an elite teacher (Kenway, 2018). At times, the research offers an over-simplified depiction of teachers as an extension of the school and consequently, there are significant gaps in understanding teachers as individuals. It is imperative to recognize the teachers’ role within the system, potential agency, practices, and areas of challenge to expand our understanding of such nuances in a culture of privilege. It is important to consider how people understand their experiences and to uncover the hidden discourses that shape their perspectives, ultimately providing a space for critical reflection and an opportunity for change. This study responds to works that call for further elucidation of the elite school environment (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b; Howard, et al., 2014) by engaging closely with the work of teachers. This study is focused on teachers’ experiences in elite private schools and not the experiences of public-school teachers in affluent neighbourhoods. This study is aimed at adding to the literature on elite private schools by focusing specifically on teachers’ experiences, therefore, interviewing administration, parents, and students is beyond the scope of this work. I detail the definition and distinguishing features of elite schools in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1 and illustrate some distinctions between publicly funded schools and elite private schools.

Privilege<sup>1</sup> can be a barrier to building an equitable world; that is, privileged self-understandings are oriented toward self-fulfillment and self-actualization, with little regard for how this might impact others and can make it difficult to look beyond one's own needs, perceptions, and visions one has created for oneself. Many graduates of elite private schools go on to hold positions of power and influence. If researchers do not further investigate how privileged self-understandings are produced and continue to shape worldviews, actions, dispositions or engage in critical dialogue from a multitude of perspectives, we will inevitably recycle our behavior and it will not yield different results. This dissertation offers a place for teachers, administrators, and other educational stakeholders alike, to identify ways in which they may perpetuate students' privilege in the daily happenings and rhythms of the school year as well as ways that they too may be marked by privileged self-conceptions in their work environment. This dissertation is also a space to think about areas in which teachers may attempt to challenge privilege and the efficacy of these efforts.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Two questions frame this study: First, how do teachers working in elite private schools perceive and negotiate privilege in various spaces? Secondly, how might these teachers' experiences engender privilege or how might they challenge it in their everyday practices? Since it is my task to uncover the nuances of privilege in the world of teaching, when referring to privilege, it is important to specify that this study will consider both teachers' experiences in relation to students' privileged self-understanding and the possibility of teachers adopting their

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2 for the definition of privilege used in this study.

own privileged self-understandings.<sup>2</sup> As well, when employing the words *engender* or *challenge*, Table 1 further specifies how these terms are used in this study.

**Table 1**

*Research Questions-Defining Key Terms*

Engendering Privilege	Engendering can refer to educators maintaining expectations of the administration and school structures that foster students' privileged self-understandings. Teachers may feel tension or express disagreement, but ultimately adhere to rules and implicit guidelines for behaviour.
	Engendering can refer to the ways teachers support students' privileged self-understandings, which looks like teachers doing what is expected but also creating space for new opportunities for privileged identities to be enacted.
	Engendering privilege can also mean that teachers adopt or embody privileged self-understandings as part of their own identity.
Challenging Privilege	Challenging refers to a direct confrontation to privileged expressions; it can include hindering or calling attention to privilege but does not always lead to a change in their practices or the structure of the school system.

Making these distinctions points to the relationship or the degree of proximity educators have with certain privileged conceptions. It distinguishes whether a privileged conception is rejected, enacted due to a sense of obligation, or assumed by the individual. Making these distinctions is beneficial when anticipating challenges and the steps necessary to introduce new workplace practices in service of institutional growth.

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1 for the definition of privileged self-understandings used in this study.

### **1.3 The Perceptions and Experiences of the Researcher**

Examining the lives of teachers is first and foremost a personal endeavour. It is a window into the beliefs, values, and complexities of people in various spaces in the educational setting. It is also personal given my intimate relationship with the topic, as I have worked in an elite private school system for eight years, and therefore this investigation is a window into the complexities of my own world. In this time, I have come to understand privilege as dynamic, and something that is constantly moving, changing, and taking on many forms. In different spaces and moments in time, I have seen privilege constrain others, and have felt constrained by it myself, as it can force educators to walk a path that may not ignite their most authentic innerworkings. Thus, I seek to better understand how teachers may be tangled in this web as either passive or active participants. Particularly, I explore how teachers may actively engender privilege, or at times, how they may feel that there is little room to challenge it given the parameters and norms of their work environments.

Specifically, my eight years of teaching have been shared between two elite private schools in different geographical regions, one school being co-ed and the other single gendered. Both schools cost over \$20,000 in annual tuition, which does not include the cost of other resources such as textbooks, electronic devices needed for class, uniforms, and school trips. Accordingly, many of the students who attend these schools come from upper-middle class to upper-class families. In contrast, I am a middle-class white female who attended a publicly funded high school, which places me in a different class and with a different set of experiences than many of the students I encounter. Working in these schools, I came to an awareness of common narratives I felt I could not ignore due to the way they called my values into question, which propelled my curiosity for understanding the ways privilege and entitlement are present in

elite private schools. Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017) discuss the importance of the reflexivity of the researcher by advocating for an awareness of how personal experiences shape one's research. My social position and emotional memories certainly shape my experience of teaching. In the retelling of my memories and reflecting on questions that arise from them, it becomes evident how my experiences have influenced my focus.

Particularly, I have witnessed privilege in some of the ways in which senior administrators have handled challenges to discipline. During one instance, I recall a female student who was disciplined by a teacher for breaking the student code of conduct and was assigned an after-school detention. Although the student admitted her faults, the mother of the student refused to let her daughter be disciplined for her offense. The parent brought it to the principal, who then ultimately excused the student from her detention or any alternative disciplinary practice. I recall my colleague at the time feeling unsupported by this decision, and responded with a sigh and sarcastic remark, "What else is new?" A time when I was personally involved with discipline practices was when I assigned a cafeteria clean-up duty to a student after not completing multiple homework checks while I was away from school coaching volleyball. The student asked if he could complete a different punishment that wasn't as public because "it wouldn't look good if the vice president of student council was completing a cafeteria clean-up." My initial response to the student was, "What did you have in mind?" rather than simply asking him to complete the task. He did not come up with an alternative punishment, and he ended up completing the cafeteria duty. In both instances, discipline appears to be something that can be negotiated by both parents and students, and in some ways, this practice was reinforced by myself and other staff. What message is being communicated to students in these everyday occurrences? What is the cumulative effect of these types of experiences?

Entitlement has also crept into assessment practices and parent-teacher relationships. A former student, for example, had received a 78% on her most recent report card. I had been working closely with the student and her current grade was in fact a 3% increase from her first term report card. She was a diligent student, and I was happy with the strides she was making in her work. However, the parent of this student was not happy with the report card mark and sent me an email expressing outrage that her daughter had worked the hardest on the last group assessment, and her mark should be well over 80%. In the email, the parent had also copied the president of the school, the principal, the vice-principal, my department head, and the guidance counsellors, which I perceive to be an intimidation tactic, especially because I was newer face to the school. I constructed an email to defend my position, which defused the situation, however, I was admittedly a little more generous in my marking moving forward to avoid another confrontation. Were these changes perceptible to the student? What did they learn from this encounter?

These stories are but a few exemplars of common, yet memorable experiences that have shaped my understanding of privilege in the elite private education system.<sup>3</sup> These were times where I felt my values as a teacher were being challenged and times when I did not defend what I believed to be equitable. I retrospectively recognized this as problematic because it communicated to students that their desires can be obtained with negotiation or through dishonest tactics. I often think about how my choices and the witnessed responses to these moments teach children about their place in the world. Are these types of experiences unique to me? What other ways are teachers tangled in the web of privilege? What else might I not be attuned to noticing in my work? This study arose from and further explores the nature of these

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2 for definition of elite schools employed in this study.

unsettling experiences and broader questions arising from my personal interactions.

### **1.5 Outline of Study**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter provides a rationale for looking into teachers' experiences, outlines my focus and research questions, and situates the researcher in relation to the topic. In Chapter 2, I review the literature to define key terms and outline the parameters of my study, particularly by analyzing foundational concepts such as elite schools, privilege, and entitlement. I then explore existing literature on class reproduction, elite schooling, and teachers' experiences to contextualize this dissertation, while also demonstrating how this research fills an existing gap in scholarship by looking at educators' experiences in elite private schools. Finally, I outline my theoretical framework that is broadly situated within critical theory and then I focus in on the specific theoretical tools that I use to investigate privileged self-understandings on a micro level of analysis, particularly by outlining how the concepts of elite identification (Gaztambide- Fernández, 2009a), originally applied to students, are helpful for examining teachers' interactions. In Chapter 3, I share the research design and analytic tools that I use in this study; particularly, it indicates the qualitative research methods used and the scope of the study.

I present my findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Chapter 4 focuses on teachers' relationships to students and their families in a variety of educational contexts, which speaks to the ways that teachers are aware of privilege and the methods they use to challenge it, as well as the efficacy of these efforts in relation to the focus of this dissertation. I then point to the teachers' experiences that play a part in maintaining or supporting the structures at work by examining teachers' experiences in various facets of their work life in order to show how aspects of students' privileged self-understandings are constructed across a variety of work-related contexts. Chapter

5 identifies the ways in which teachers themselves adopt privileged self-understandings around exclusion, excellence, and engagement in how they prioritize high achievers in academics and athletics, while there is less support and inequitable treatment given to those who do not match the ideal, which also extends to minority students. Subsequently, Chapter 6 also looks at the teachers' privileged self-conceptions by considering the relationships between colleagues and how they too are marked by exclusionary notions based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. Therefore, this study shows that teachers in elite private schools are not only implicated by, but contribute to, the reproduction of privileged self-understandings. They support students' privileged self-understanding and maintain the structure of the elite school environment in a variety of educational spheres due to fear and a feeling of being monitored by parents. However, they are also active in its reproduction by adopting privileged self-understandings in terms of how they conceive of their responsibility and work as teachers in relation to students and their interactions with colleagues. I conclude this dissertation in Chapter 7 by summarizing the key findings and offering considerations for future change for a variety of educational stakeholders.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

I will begin by reviewing literature concerning elite private schools, particularly starting with how elite educational spaces, privilege, and entitlement are defined in past and recent scholarship to illustrate how this study employs these terms. Secondly, I will look at the ways in which various actors in education, namely teachers, parents, and students, have been studied in relation to class reproduction in privileged environments. This section will demonstrate that there is a research gap regarding how teachers have been included, or rather, excluded, in the study of privilege. Particularly, teachers' experiences in elite private schools have not been the primary focus in scholarship but have been a means to access and investigate questions pertaining to privileged students. In the final section, I describe the theoretical underpinnings that I apply in this study.

### **2.1 Defining Terms: Elite Schools, Privilege and Entitlement**

#### ***2.1.1 Elite Schools***

What are elite schools? Seldom do studies take a methodical approach when defining this term, rather, descriptions of and investigations into the nature of affluent families, abundant resources, and rigorous academic programs often characterize elite schools as a place of privilege (Courtois, 2017; Finn, 2012; Galloway & Conner, 2015; Howard et al., 2014; Kahn 2011; Koh & Kenway, 2016; Lim & Apple, 2015). Furthermore, elite schools are often associated with exclusiveness, whereby elite status is maintained through the expression of cultural capital that is out of reach for the vast majority (Ayling, 2019; Bourdieu 1984, 1998 Boyd, 1973; Cookson & Persell, 1985, Prosser, 2020). While exclusiveness is integral to conceptualizing elite spaces, studies typically do not distinguish between elite and less established private schools, which arguably differ in their character.

In *Preparing for Power*, Cookson and Persell (1985) attempt to offer a clear description and distinguishing characteristics of elite private schools in the United States in two ways. First, Cookson and Persell (1985) maintain that elite private schools are sites that elite families use to maintain social class, whereby children learn to appropriate social roles and behaviours. In essence, they position these schools as “status seminaries” producing a particular type of elite person (Cookson & Persell, 1985, p. 22). Secondly, Cookson and Persell use this understanding in conjunction with the *Handbook of Private Schools*, published in 1981, which lists 289 schools as America’s leading boarding schools to distinguish elite from other types of existing private schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985). Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) recognizes Cookson and Persell’s work as a first step in offering a definition, but also expresses the need for a clearer distinction to be made in academia and takes on this very task (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b).

Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) proposes that there are five ways in which a school can be identified as elite, those being *typologically, scholastically, historically, geographically, and demographically* elite. Although he focuses on boarding schools, he proposes that the categories extend beyond this schooling environment. *Typologically elite* suggests that these schools identify as independent bodies, which allows them to be self-governing and self-supported, and have the autonomy to select students, faculty, and curriculum (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009b, p. 1100). *Scholastically elite* describes the range and high quality of courses offered, expansive learning opportunities available inside and outside the classroom, and the implementation of pedagogy based on constructivist learning theory. Of course, these offerings are made possible by small class sizes and optimized classroom conditions due to available infrastructure and access to resources in support of these learning objectives (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p.1113). *Historically elite* refers to elite private schools’ survival of the growth of public

education, due to their specific function of serving the upper class or elites of society and therefore, remain in place due to their abundance of social, cultural, and economic capital (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p. 1107). Being *geographically elite* highlights the space available to develop the ideal infrastructure for education, as well as the physical landscape and school environment offering much aesthetic appeal and the comforts of wealth and abundance (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p. 1108). *Demographically elite* refers to a large portion of the student population being perceived as successful in their academics with acceptances to prestigious colleges. As well, he suggests that despite attempts to be diverse through recruitment processes, elite schools are still relatively homogenous in their representation, especially in terms of racial diversity and socio-economic status (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p. 1109).

Despite the differing approaches, both Cookson and Persell (1985) and Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) offer important considerations for identifying elite schools in a Canadian context, specifically in Ontario, which is the site of investigation for this study. Although dismissed by Gaztambide-Fernández, Cookson and Persell's (1985) use of lists of elite schools in the United States serves as a catalyst to think about how lists of leading schools are generated in Ontario. The *Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS)* and the *Conference of Independent Schools (CIS) of Ontario* are two governing associations that offer legitimacy to member schools due to the regulatory processes in place. To be part of CAIS, there are membership fees, annual reports that must be submitted, and a review and accreditation process is conducted every seven years (CAIS). Similarly, membership in CIS is a sign of the school's prestige and reputability amongst Ontario communities due to requirements such as evidence of financial stability, a board of governance, registration with the Ontario Ministry of Education, the offering of university preparatory courses, as well as a having a reputation of excellence

(CIS). Accordingly, teachers' work and experiences in schools with membership in one or both governing organizations will be included in the study.

Secondly, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009b) has also proven to be valuable when thinking about schools in Ontario that should be included and excluded in the study. One could argue that publicly funded schools located in affluent neighbourhoods mimic the private school environment. In addition, one may suggest that publicly funded schools with specialized programs that require an admission process are similar to or mimic an elite environment by nature of exclusion (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017). However, using Gaztambide-Fernández' criteria, one may see a typological or demographic overlap between elite private schools and specialized publicly funded schools in affluent neighbourhoods (Gaztambide-Fernández & Garlen Maudlin, 2015), but they do not express all characteristics. Public schools in affluent neighbourhoods are still subject to the local school board guidelines, and there are limitations to the degree of autonomy and funding, and therefore, are not capable of producing the same environment. Moreover, Gaztambide-Fernández' (2009b) criteria is helpful in narrowing the focus by examining the specific type of private school under investigation. The word "elite" attached to "private schools" signifies that not all schools are ranked as equal; that is, charging for education does not necessarily produce an elite school because there are many private schools that are newly emerging and less established, and many do not have the resources (i.e. geographic or scholastic) or cultural capital to be considered elite. Thus, the teachers' relationships and experiences in *typologically, scholastically, historically<sup>4</sup>, geographically and demographically elite* schools are the primary focus of this study.

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<sup>4</sup> When applying the category of historically elite, it does not necessarily mean I excluded a participant who has worked in a school that has not existed for a lengthy period of time. Schools can be historically elite if they are repeating the historical processes of catering to elite demographics and have an abundance of cultural, social, and economic capital to maintain their existence.

### **2.1.2 Privilege**

As mentioned, elite schools are commonly understood to be places of privilege and there are three prominent conceptualizations of privilege that have emerged in recent scholarship that I consider. The first is privilege as a possession based on one's social location; secondly, privilege is conceived as transnational and fluid, best understood amongst different axes of space, place, and time; lastly, privilege is understood as an aspect of one's self-understanding or an embodied identity. These different understandings of the term privilege certainly inform and offer considerations for this study, but the primary object of investigation is privilege as an aspect of one's identity or self-understanding.

Firstly, privilege has been regarded as the advantage given based on one's social position in society (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984). Peggy McIntosh (1988) best illustrates this understanding of privilege through her discussion of the *invisible knapsack*; she looks at two types of privilege, one being *unearned advantage* and the other, *conferred dominance*. Unearned advantage occurs when basic needs and opportunities such as safety, respect, and access to life's opportunities, are more often provided to a certain group of people, and these advantages in access are seldom acknowledged by those who are privileged (McIntosh, 1988). Furthermore, conferred dominance is when dominant groups are formed based on patterns of control, which preserve hierarchical structures (McIntosh, 1988). Hence, recognizing privilege is about seeing how one's class, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation all play an important role in creating hierarchical structures and affords certain groups licenses and opportunities based on their identity markers. It is also about recognizing that typically upper-class, Christian, White, able-bodied, heterosexual males hold the highest position of privilege (Goodman, 2001; Jensen, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Wise, 2005). This definition proposes that privilege is the means one has to

access resources or comforts based on where one is positioned within the social hierarchy. These concepts inform my study by providing a lens to identify who is typically included and excluded in elite communities, and how the over-representation of White, upper-class families within elite schools in Ontario has implications on the culture of the school and for those who are minorities in these contexts. This framework also shapes my thinking about the existence of social rankings within schools, and the different experiences in education for students and teachers alike based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation and other identity markers. This study takes these considerations one step further by looking at how these social locations and rankings become infused into one's self-conceptions and understandings.

There has also been recent interest in understanding privilege on a transnational level, recognizing the fluidity and multiple expressions of elite identity based on context. Hughes (2021) examines how a global phenomenon like the Covid-19 pandemic has had a bearing on elite institutions. He suggests that the advantages of privileged environments have been amplified and educational gaps have widened due to the disparity in access to resources and support, whether physical or online. Howard and Freeman (2020) explore global citizenship education in single-sex elite schools in Australia, Chile, Denmark, Ghana, Jordan, and Taiwan. Their findings suggest that students in elite schools aren't given the requisite skills that allow for understanding differences, but rather, they are taught to respect individuals because of the commonalities of humanity. However, they argue that education should focus on respect that is cultivated for knowing and honouring difference in the individual (Howard & Freeman, 2020). Although elite schools may promote global citizenship, the consequences of these limitations are the production of elite subjects through values and ideals associated with social cohesion (Howard & Freeman, 2020).

Koh and Kenway (2016) are editors and authors in a multi-volume book that draws upon studies from various authors to examine how privilege is maintained beyond national boundaries. Koh and Kenway (2016) accept the common understanding of privilege as tied to wealthy families, superior learning facilities, and well-developed, far-reaching curriculum, but they also think about the way that privilege moves beyond the material. They point to privilege as something that moves through multiple scales, intersecting spaces and places to demonstrate both patterns and diverse expressions of its working. Furthermore, they apply comparative multinational analysis to multiple countries in order to draw comparisons and conclusions about systemic practices (Koh & Kenway, 2016). Privilege has been conceptualized as fluid, due to the myriad ways that it can be understood in various places, times, and spaces (Ayling, 2019; Ball, 2016). This conceptualization is helpful in thinking about how privilege may be described differently, but functions similarly as I speak to teachers in schools with their own unique contexts. Furthermore, this concept brings to light the importance of being cognizant of how macro structures are reflected in the microstructures of schools and vice versa.

Alternatively, scholars such as Forbes and Lingard (2013), Howard (2008), Howard et al. (2014), and Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) maintain that privilege is cultivated through the disposition and actions of subjects and the ways in which it has a bearing on one's self-understanding. Khan (2011) defines privilege as a "sense of self" through the interactions that motivate a person (p. 14). Reay (2013) makes the distinction that privilege is less about who you know and more about your approach and disposition to the world. It is about how a person's beliefs and dispositions are subjected to a cycle of creation with privilege as the governing force (Howard, 2008). Through her investigation of the experiences of both lower and affluent classes, Brantlinger (2007) maintains that social class is intertwined and intrinsic to how one constructs

identity. Maxwell and Aggleton's (2013), editors of a multi-authored work, examine conceptions of privilege by exploring the self-understanding and actions of subjects; that is, they examine elite spaces and discuss the relationship between privilege, agency and affect as mutually constituted, whereby agency is "possible through privilege and/or affect" (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013, p. 4). Privilege as identity is the primary concern of this study, and particularly, I use Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009a) notion that privilege arises from the actions of individuals and contributes to one's self-conception to think about how privilege exists and functions in elite institutions. Specifically, I use Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009a) five aspects of elite identification, which is further discussed in Section 2.4.1 of this chapter. I am investigating the way teachers may experience privilege, and particularly, I focus on how their described responses may be an attempt to either challenge or support students' privileged identities. I subsequently examine the ways in which many teachers resist or adopt privileged self-understandings given the context in which they work, including how teachers continue to perpetuate privilege through the routinized choices and normalized practices of the school's culture and I examine the extent to which teachers are aware of these routines. I consider the ways that teachers may intentionally or unintentionally adopt expressions of privilege into practice or how privilege is not equally extended to all members of the school. I also focus on teachers' own negotiating of identity and agency in these privileged spaces and examine how their own self-understanding is contested and shaped within these environments. In exploring the possible ways privilege is maintained, or what happens when teachers attempt to address privilege, a clearer relationship can be understood in how privilege is reproduced or how disruption might be possible in future educational endeavours.

### ***2.1.3 Entitlement***

Entitlement is a common term used to describe the products of elite schools and is closely associated with privilege. However, entitlement, like privilege, has variances in its use in recent scholarship. The term has regularly described one's attitude or disposition but has also been used to denote significant change in understandings of privileged identity. Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2013) suggests that having a sense of entitlement is primarily focused on agency, which is about holding the perception that one has the freedom and ability to act unincumbered. Many scholars speak of the entitlement in privileged educational spaces, specifically referring to entitlement around assessment, grading practices, or successful futures (Baker, 2013; Howard, 2008; Sparks, 2018). However, entitlement is also used to categorize and distinguish between the historically elite and the new elite. Khan (2011) views the new elite as having a privileged identity but argues that entitlement describes the old elite who held a sense of entitlement to certain resources largely due to familial merit and status. In contrast, the new elite hold a privileged identity based on their perceived experiences of meritocracy and acting with a sense of ease (Khan, 2011). Törnqvist (2019) adds a variation to this understanding of the new elite by completing an ethnographic study of a Swedish upper secondary school that specializes in environmental and global issues. She argues that rather than entitlement, it is an egalitarian ethos of the school that instills in individuals the drive and capacity to be leaders and positive changemakers; that is, a sense of agency and confidence instilled in elite students can mobilize ethical ideals that work against traditional hierarchies and familial status (Törnqvist, 2019). Through these analyses, Khan (2011) and Törnqvist (2019) point to the complexities and new ways that the upper-class understands the self beyond familial background.

A common notion amongst scholars in this field is that privilege and agency are produced

in elite environments, however, disagreement arises in how the term *entitlement* is understood. I recognize the category of the new elite offered by the works of Khan (2011) and Törnqvist (2019) but will employ *entitlement* to describe expressions of agency. Entitlement is one aspect of how privileged self-conceptions take expression and are reinforced in the school environment. (See 2.4 *Theoretical Framework* for more specific information on how this term is applied in this study.)

## **2.2 Class Reproduction: Students, Parents, and Educators in Elite Schools**

This section focuses on literature that discusses the role and relationship between schools, students, and parents regarding class reproduction as well as elite identity formation. I begin by exploring how schools are situated as sites of social reproduction, first with a focus on economic realities and then to a shift in scholarship on how culture is a salient focus in reproducing class. Secondly, I will highlight research that speaks to the relationship between students, family, and schools in the making of privileged self-understandings. Lastly, I will engage with studies that focus on teachers' experiences and class broadly speaking, as well as intersectional perspectives to highlight the paucity of scholarship on teachers' experiences in relation to the culture of elite private schools in Canada.

Rooted in the Marxist tradition, Bowles and Gintis' (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America* reveals the hidden curriculum of education by elucidating the structures of capitalism that dictate the social interactions in the system. Ultimately, they argued that schools sustain inequality through the correspondence between social relations in school and the workplace. Working-class, minority students are taught punctuality, respect for authority, and external controls of behaviour, while intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness are reserved for the upper class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Furthermore, the reproduction of social class comes from

common, structural experiences of alienation, hierarchy, and fragmentation amongst the working-class, who are not encouraged to exercise individual autonomy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). However, the reproduction theory of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and others (Kapferer, 1986; Mickelson, 1990) is primarily criticized for not considering human agency and forms of resistance in schools. Studies like these tend to look at schools as a direct response to the needs of capitalist ideals, without leaving much room for differences in experiences within socioeconomic class. This approach has been critiqued for failing to recognize that “culture is also lived” (Apple, 1995, p. 61). A more complete analysis would consider schools as sites of production and reproduction, the experiences of varying classes, as well opportunities for resistance and human autonomy (Apple 1982; Apple & Weis 1983; Giroux 1984; Willis, 1981). I share in this critique to think about the lived and varying experiences of educators, and the relationship between human autonomy and structures of the school.

Unlike the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) or more recent scholarship that returns to economic realities to investigate class (Gamsu, 2022), Bourdieu’s (1974) framework focuses on how other forms of capital are used to preserve social class conditions. Bourdieu provides an alternative means of understanding how privilege and disadvantage are maintained, that being through choices that are influenced by one’s place within class structures (Bourdieu 1974; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). One’s habitus, the disposition one holds due to life’s experiences and circumstances, gives rise to these choices and stems from our social class backgrounds to shape the way we interact in the world both consciously and unconsciously. Bourdieu examined culture as a form of capital, that is, knowing how to act and present oneself in certain spaces can be used for one’s advantage. Bourdieu identifies schools as playing a part in reproducing inequality by rewarding the cultural capital of the privileged (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998). As well,

there are certain strategies that parents employ to maintain their class, and middle-class parents use specific tactics to gain entry to the upper-class (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998), whether through *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2003) or by enrolling their children in an elite institution (Baker, 2013; Bourdieu, 1998; Peat, 2020). Elite status necessitates a process of becoming whereby certain attributes and dispositions are embodied, and elite schooling is considered a large and important part of this becoming (Ayling, 2019; Bourdieu, 1984; 1998). In response to Bourdieu & Passerson's (1977) work, Galloway and Conner (2015) identify how the education system reflects social structures:

Dominant groups decide what gets taught, how it gets taught, and what is achievement or success and then perpetuates these narrowly defined concepts to ensure existing power relationships. These decisions constitute the culture that schools are mandated to reproduce. (p. 101)

This notion presupposes many studies on privileged identities of students in elite schools. Many scholars investigate the ways in which privilege is maintained via school culture, and explore how dominant groups shape and make decisions to maintain power relationships, thereby creating elite subjects.

Galloway and Conner (2015) examine the realities of elite schools through the perspectives of students. They discuss how privilege is maintained in private schools despite the potential for negative experiences to students' social and emotional health due to a highly competitive environment, which is also supported by Brantlinger's (2007) study of perceived 'winners' of the education system; she noticed dissatisfaction and depression that is commonly experienced by those students who come from a higher socioeconomic status (Brantlinger, 2007). Galloway and Conner (2015) conclude that although high stress levels and competition

characterize school culture, students saw the value of maintaining privilege in the school by seeking traditional notions of success through extra-curricular involvement and being high achievers as a gateway to lucrative professions. Although, at times, students faulted the pressures of academic performance associated with the culture, students were active in working the system to their advantage. Students showed a willingness to question authority and the grades they received, sought extra credit, and at times, found ways to cheat and manipulate the system (Galloway & Conner, 2015).

Pfaffendor (2019) examines elite youth struggling with addiction who attend therapeutic boarding schools and argues that the process of social restoration is a significant part of social reproduction of elite groups. Although the stigma that comes with addiction may initially be seen as a blemish to one's character, Pfaffenfor (2019) argues that the way one overcomes and responds to stigma can be tactfully used to restore privilege. Elite students are not excused from difficult life events, but the leveraging of various strategies and resources is a salient component to social reproduction and forming elite subjects.

Although there are challenging experiences at school, academic ease is often part of the elite identity. Being able to manipulate your way through difficult situations with the appearance of minimal effort is regarded as a skill (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011), and defying or resisting authority without reprimand is often the norm (Fitzgerald, 1994). Kahn (2011) describes a sense of ease as part of elite identity beyond academia, defined as possessing a sense of comfort in knowing how to exist and act in any space, not just simply looking the part. Echoing similar sentiments, in her simultaneous exploration of class and gender reproduction in elite single-gendered private schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Baker (2013) demonstrated how student-teacher relationships can become advantageous for the elite; she argues that these

relationships are more than collegial, and benefits are materialized through experiences such as student entitlement to individual preferences in learning, teacher coaching and hints about assessments, negotiating grades, and the voice that students have in establishing parameters around assessment practices. Taylor (2021) would describe the student-teacher relationship in elite schools as friendly, without fear, or as flattened hierarchy, which provides students with a sense of ease to navigate the school and creates space to practice mastering conversations with authority, a skill needed to form elite understandings. However, in examining this relationship, both Baker (2013) and Taylor (2021) do not explicitly consult teachers about their exploration of this process, which is an area my study will speak to as I highlight the voices of educators in their work environments.

Furthermore, whiteness or one's proximity to whiteness is also associated with forming and producing privileged subjects. Gaztambide-Fernández & Agnod (2019) argue that eliteness is always seen through the lens of whiteness; that is, one must not necessarily be White, but they must subscribe to the ideals of whiteness. They describe that when students of colour enter elite environments, they encounter difficulties negotiating their identities in these spaces as they are held up against the ideals of whiteness. As well, the authors propose that much existing scholarship on elites ignores race, which is a significant shortcoming as eliteness and whiteness are always intertwined in understanding the making of privileged identities (Gaztambide-Fernández & Agnod, 2020). Similarly, Ayling (2015) discusses the notion of the colonial habitus to include discussions of race more explicitly, merging the work of Fanon (1967/2008) and Bourdieu (1984;1998). In her work, Ayling (2015) argues that wealthy Nigerian parents choose British boarding schools because of their proximity to whiteness. Magwood (2021) discusses the implications of how race plays a role in how students (and teachers) are held accountable in

schools, calling attention to greater leniency for White students over Black students, and superficial forms of diversity education instituted in these spaces. I build upon these findings in Chapters 5 and 6 of my study when discussing how teachers in elite schools treat both students and colleagues according to the ideals of whiteness.

Lareau (2003) focuses on the familial aspect of understanding students' ability to optimize opportunity and advantage in the system, as previously described. Lareau (2003) posits that concerted cultivation, a practice of child-rearing that fosters cognitive skills by focusing on the talents, opinions, and skills of children, is frequent among middle-class families in comparison to working-class families. Concerted cultivation not only shapes environments through extra-curriculars and home activities, but also extends to parental intervention in institutional settings to individualize educational experiences for their children. Lareau (2003) maintains that these practices teach children how to get organizations to meet their individual needs, leading to social profit and educational advantages.

Koh (2018) continues the dialogue on the use of strategies for maintaining class by studying youth's agency and identity once they have left their elite high school. Koh (2018) discusses that despite temporary difficulties experienced by youth once they have graduated, the learnings from elite circuits (including their families and elite schools) allow them to find their way back into successful positions, ultimately suggesting that the skills and strategies they learn in earlier years are advantageous later in life. Recognizing familial roles in the making of elite identity impacts some of the areas of negotiation experienced by teachers in this study. These ideas are foundational in understanding how participants implemented grading, assessment, and discipline practices, especially in Chapter 4.

Using Lareau's (2003) concept of concerted cultivation to examine young women's experiences in four private schools in England, Maxwell and Aggleton (2013) found that young women's accomplishments and assuredness in their abilities create distinct identities that become pivotal in reproducing forms of privilege in adulthood. By contrast, Sparks (2018), in discussing male students in an elite school in Auckland, New Zealand, found that privilege is apparent in their comportment especially when observing group dynamics, in both what they said and how they spoke. Although there was some uncertainty expressed by the boys in private spaces or in their diaries, it was evident that a sense of entitlement was intrinsic to their expressions of masculinity. Strong body language and confidence were characteristic of the way they performed class, especially through repeated assertions that they would attend university and study a valued degree (Sparks, 2018). Although expressions of heteronormative sexuality create differences in how gender is performed in elite schools (Connell, 1989; Forbes & Lingard, 2015; Khan, 2011), a privileged identity is a commonality between both males and females. While this research pertains to students, it is helpful to think about how gendered experiences can also be reflected in relation to educators; the notion of gendered differences in elite institutions is a theme that I explore in terms of teachers' work relations.

These studies summarize the ways in which class is reproduced by examining the triad of family, student, and school. They depict student agency in educational spaces to align with features of class identity and show how whiteness is closely tied to understanding the making of an elite subject. They highlight the role of parental involvement and strategic steps that parents may employ to ensure advantage is maintained. As well, there are acknowledged pressures and demands of elite schooling. The research, however, points to elite schools' overall benefits and advantages for the upper class. These understandings are salient for recognizing some of the

tensions of class reproduction discussed in Chapter 4 and then contextualized in Chapter 5, which describes how teachers may assume their own privileged understandings in their work environments. However, in studies such as these, the voice of the teacher is observed informally, through the perspective of the student, or in support of institutional goals. Many of these studies propose that schools are for students, but are impossible without the teacher (Cookson & Persell, 1985), and teachers' work is studied within this lens. However, thinking about the daily work of the teacher offers new insights to this narrative and educators' perspectives about privilege in their work environments.

### ***2.2.1 Teachers' Experiences: Class and Elite Schools***

This section contextualizes teachers' experiences with class and privilege, while also pointing to the paucity of studies that overlap with the interests of this dissertation. Given that there is limited research on teachers' experiences in elite private schools, this section pulls from scholarship both from the educational field broadly speaking and where accessible, elite private schools, to situate some of the themes and findings this study builds upon.

There is a body of literature that has described how a teacher's perceptions and actions are based on social class, and how curriculum, pedagogy, and beliefs about student achievement are central in reproducing class ideals amongst schools. Anyon (1980) makes the case that teachers' work and practices are largely influenced by broader class structures, and particularly, that teaching caters to the social class of the student. Whereas didactic forms of instruction and the development of basic competencies were common amongst schools primarily comprised of working class families, creative and imaginative teaching strategies were reserved for affluent and elite schools (Anyon, 1980). Through modifying Anyon's (1980) social class categorizes, Brantlinger (2003) investigates how various educators are perceived according to their social

positions. Brantlinger (2003) considers teachers' understanding of the current trends in education, student ability based on the social class location of the students, and the overall purpose of education, finding distinct variations in perspective by paying close attention to connotations in word choice. She interviews 15 teachers who would be considered middle class, or "in-the-middle" professionals and speaks to 15 teachers who were considered affluent, known as "already-there" or "upward strivers", who shared characteristics of the middle class but shared attitudes of the affluent families (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 73). Already-there educators emphasized the need for advanced achievement, viewed the education system as an equitable place, and justified social disparity by student intelligence and capability (Brantlinger, 2003). In-the-middle educators focused more heavily on the social, civic, and non-academic objectives of education, and found that ideal students were those that conformed to institutional standards but did not necessarily have to be high achieving (Brantlinger, 2003). Brantlinger's (2003) study is significant in showing how influential the ideologies of the affluent class are on teachers' perceptions and beliefs of teachers, which is a topic that overlaps with my focus on how teachers' form self-conceptions and negotiate identity based upon their experiences in elite private schools. There have also been studies that focus on class and decision making, particularly within elite schools. Building on Anyon's (1980) conceptions, Lim and Apple (2015) investigate how cultural reproduction of the elite is found in schools in Singapore through teaching and encouraging critical thinking skills, which suggests that Anyon's findings hold merit across geographical borders.

These studies are imperative for recognizing the connection between social class and teachers' work, but they do not engage with the self-conceptions of teachers or some are missing an elite private school focus. However, there are some researchers who think about teacher

agency and identity in relationship to the affluent class. Barrett's (2017) longitudinal case study examines the ways in which a new middle class science teacher in an affluent Canadian high school negotiates his professional identity. She argues that the variances in social class had implications for curricular selections, teacher-parent and teacher-student relationships, as well as other colleagues (Barrett, 2017). There was a fear of parental monitoring, which influenced the new teacher to make curricular choices that coincided with parents' class ideologies, and the teacher was careful in how far he pushed differing views (Barrett, 2017). As well, he was cautious of how he presented himself in front of students and other educators, as those relationships often functioned as an extension of parental monitoring (Barrett, 2017).

It is only in recent scholarship that there have been a few who have directly investigated teachers' experiences and identity in elite school environments. Variyan (2018), in his doctoral dissertation on elite private schools in Australia, looks at the transformative potential of teachers' agency within elite schools and finds that they are limited in their ability to make change. At times, their agency is compromised by students, often when considering gender differentials; experiences of sexual violence are prominent among young female teachers due to male students' exertion of power in these spaces. Additionally, male teachers were more self-assured in comparison to female educators. Furthering this, Variyan (2019a; 2019b) argues that despite moral qualms that may arise in elite spaces, he finds that teachers in private schools often embrace privilege. Similarly, Pinto-Dror and Shoshana (2022) examine teacher identity in elite schools in Israel and find that educators maintain personal advantage through a shared habitus with students, which also reinforces students' cultural capital and elite identity. They highlight that teachers conceptualize excellence as part of teacher identity and hold onto the belief that only specially selected teachers can work in this particular environment (Pinto-Dror & Shoshana,

2022). Howard (2008) discusses the contradictions in private schools between what is taught in the classroom and the structures of the school that reinforce alternate learnings. Although he proposes that there are cultural scripts for teachers, he envisions a future where teacher agency will allow for meaningful changes at school through an orientation towards social justice (Howard, 2008).

### ***2.2.2 Teachers' Experiences: Intersectional Perspectives***

This section continues to contextualize teachers' experiences with class and privilege, but more specifically through an intersectional perspective. Given that there is limited research on teachers' experiences in elite private schools, this section also pulls from scholarship from the educational field broadly speaking and where accessible, elite private schools, to situate some of the themes and findings this study builds upon.

This study, like some others, examines differences among teachers' experiences in elite schools through their various identity markers. Magwood (2021) argues that difficulties retaining Black and Brown teachers in elite private schools in the United States is often due to the schools putting forth disingenuous and superficial goals in service of racial equity. Due to differing beliefs, these superficial goals are used to avoid potential conflict with alumni and the parent community – both of whom the institution heavily relies upon for funding and donations. Magwood (2021) also notes that Black educators are often racially gaslighted by administration, and are subjected to higher standards or greater scrutiny by various stakeholders such as parents and administration, in comparison to White colleagues. Hughes (2021) points to the positive ways elite institutions in North American have been reformed by the calling out of privileged identities in light of the death of George Floyd and a focus on the Black Lives Matter movements. However, Hughes also cautions against superficial or short-lived initiatives that can

prevent authentic change within these institutions.

This study also considers how teachers' beliefs influence the experiences of English Language Learners (ELLs). This topic has not been a focus in scholarship on elite private schools, however, it serves as an important area of focus in education broadly speaking. I look to other educational landscapes according to these shared themes to contextualize how my study will continue to add to the dialogue. In a qualitative study on publicly funded high schools in the US, Kanno and Kangas (2014) found that as a result of teachers' practices, ELLs do not advance to post-secondary programs as successfully as their non-ELL peers. This is partly due to teachers' practices in high schools that restrict curricular choices, the lack of scaffolding for students by educators, and minimized opportunities for rigorous academic programming. They find that ELLs are subjected to a linguistic habitus that systemically diminishes their ability to successfully gain post-secondary placements in the US, which echoes Rawal and De Costa's (2019) findings. There have been calls for reform in how teachers and schools support ELL learners (Khan, 2012; MacPherson et al., 2004). This study will add to these understandings by discussing how teaching strategies in elite school environments are linked to privileged self-understandings of educators.

I also explore the queer identity of teachers in elite private schools. While this topic is understudied, there is scholarship about queer educators' experiences in a Canadian context, which highlights a diversity of experiences (Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2010). Tompkins et al. (2019), for example, followed four pre-service teachers across Canada and found a plurality of experiences which include: feelings of isolation, experiences of hostility and homophobia, and uncertainty about their willingness to come out at school. Tompkins et al. (2019) also acknowledge queer educators' ability to advocate for

2SLGBTQ+ rights in the school context as a form of leadership and empowerment (Tompkins et al., 2019). Taylor et al. (2015) report on 2SLGBTQ+ educators across Canada from K-12 and posits that educators in schools with homophobic and transphobic harassment policies feel more capable to address inequity in the school. Taylor et al. (2015) also shares that religion can be a determinant of how educators felt they could respond to anti-2SLGBTQ+ incidents within their school community:

Educators whose religion generally approved of same-sex marriage were most likely to agree that they could respond effectively to anti-LGBTQ + incidents at their schools (90%), while those from religions with mixed views were much less likely to agree (73%) and those whose religions were generally opposed were the least likely to agree (68%). (p. 124)

Furthermore, Taylor et al. (2016) finds distinctions between 2SLGBTQ+ and cisgender, heterosexual educators' worldviews, with some of these differences being that 2SLGBTQ+ teachers have greater awareness of harassment or are less likely to see school as a safe place, especially for 2SLGBTQ+ students, and are more likely to create curricular supports for queer students. This study will build upon this scholarship by speaking to the perceptions, implicit biases, and differences of teacher experiences based on how religious affiliations and teacher identity shape teachers' self-understandings in elite school environments.

### **2.3 Summary**

The literature suggests that teachers' identity, choices, and practices are shaped by class structures, both their own and those of students they teach. Existing research also discusses how gender, race, and linguistic variables in both the broad educational landscape and elite schools specifically, mark teachers' experiences and perceptions. However, the paucity of work that

specifically engages with teachers' experiences in elite schools suggests that further investigation is needed. Focusing specifically on the experience of the teacher, not only through class relations but how class intersects with other identity markers, will help to critically understand how privilege is woven into the fabric of the school. This study positions teachers as the common thread to think about how privileged self-understandings are formed by investigating a variety of experiences and interactions that occur in cycle of the school year. This study places importance on teachers' negotiating of identity in these privileged spaces, how their own self-understanding and sense of agency is contested and shaped, and how these negotiations might speak to broader patterns of privileged self-understandings for students and teachers alike.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory, originally stemming from the Frankfurt School and further developed under the leadership of Max Horkheimer, differentiated itself from traditional theory by recognizing that approaches within the social sciences failed to elucidate power relations, and they therefore failed to provide a holistic picture of society (Brincat, 2016). The essence of critical theory is to uncover the limitations of structure for the purpose of transforming it (Brincat, 2016). This study is situated within critical theory, in my examination of school structures that place conditions and restraints on the flourishing of individuals and communities by thinking analytically about their historical, social, and cultural contexts (Fossey et al., 2002). Particularly, in highlighting the nature of privilege in elite spaces and teachers' experiences within this reality, the hope is to think about teachers' capacity or agentic abilities to create change. My focus on privilege, power imbalances, and social reproduction in elite schools is aimed at identifying the mechanisms by which privilege is produced for the purpose of disrupting it.

In *Best of the Best*, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) offers a framework for understanding the relationship between elite schools and the (re)production of elite students through the process of internalizing privilege. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) asserts that “having access to economic resources alone does not give a person elite status; rather, the ability to demonstrate particular dispositions, knowledge, and aesthetic choices is essential in order to assert a particular status-group membership” (p. 11). He aims to look at the cultural practices that give rise to students’ identification with elite status, and the ways in which individuals and/or groups internalize the privileges of their educational setting (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). He offers five categories for thinking about the process of elite identity formation, which he calls the *Five Es* of elite schooling. The Five Es draw upon the notion that social class comes from external mechanisms in the form of discourse and ideology, and are simultaneously created through outward, internalized expressions of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2009a) framework allows for understanding teachers’ experiences in their work environments within a variety of relations and spaces.

I utilize the Five Es to define and understand how privilege exists and is embodied in these elite spaces. As an alternative to “the Five Es”, I interchangeably use the phrases “privileged self-understandings” or “privileged self-conceptions” in reference to the processes and end results of internalized privilege. Although this framework was designed for understanding how students form elite identities, I apply this structure to teachers’ experiences as well, including their own identities and experiences in which they support or challenge the elite identities that students hold. First, I will discuss the categories as applied to students in Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2009a) work, and then I will summarize and visually represent how I use this framework in understanding teachers’ work.

The first of the Five Es, *Exclusion*, begins with the admission process involved in attending an elite school, whereby inclusion or admission to the school is deemed as a sign of success based on the intrinsic characteristics of the student (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). This initial process of inclusion/exclusion is the primary step in how elite school students form strong conceptions of themselves as both smart and hardworking (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Repetitions of this process of inclusion and exclusion continue throughout the cycle of the school year through ranking systems of student success, both formally and informally through awards, extracurriculars, and public perception. Within this concept of exclusion, an intersectional perspective brings to light how exclusionary notions unfold, and how rankings begin to form in the school community not only according to meritocracy, but also through identity markers.

*Engagement* refers to the plethora of previously developed interests brought into the school and the ample opportunities for students to find their niche within the school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a), which operates as a form of Lareau's (2003) concerted cultivation. Again, these interests and opportunities are hierarchically organized, where the students' unique talents or roles helps them to place themselves within this hierarchy of elite identity. Simultaneously, this niche plays a salient part in the process of applying to programs or universities, where a successful and lucrative career becomes an expected outcome (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). The seemingly individual experience of overcoming the challenges and obstacles that come with building skill and finding a niche in the school becomes a shared way that students begin to understand themselves as deserving members of the elite community.

*Excellence* is not necessarily about being the best or excelling at everything one does, but students are generally expected to work hard at their selected speciality or niche and continually demonstrate excellence in their endeavours (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). As well, the

“community that never rests” and the notion of the “academic race” are two existing narratives that foster a belief in meritocracy and sets the foundation for laying claim to future privilege (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a, p. 202). Multifaceted demonstrations of excellence become an outward indicator to others that they are worthy of elite identification and have earned a place at the school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a).

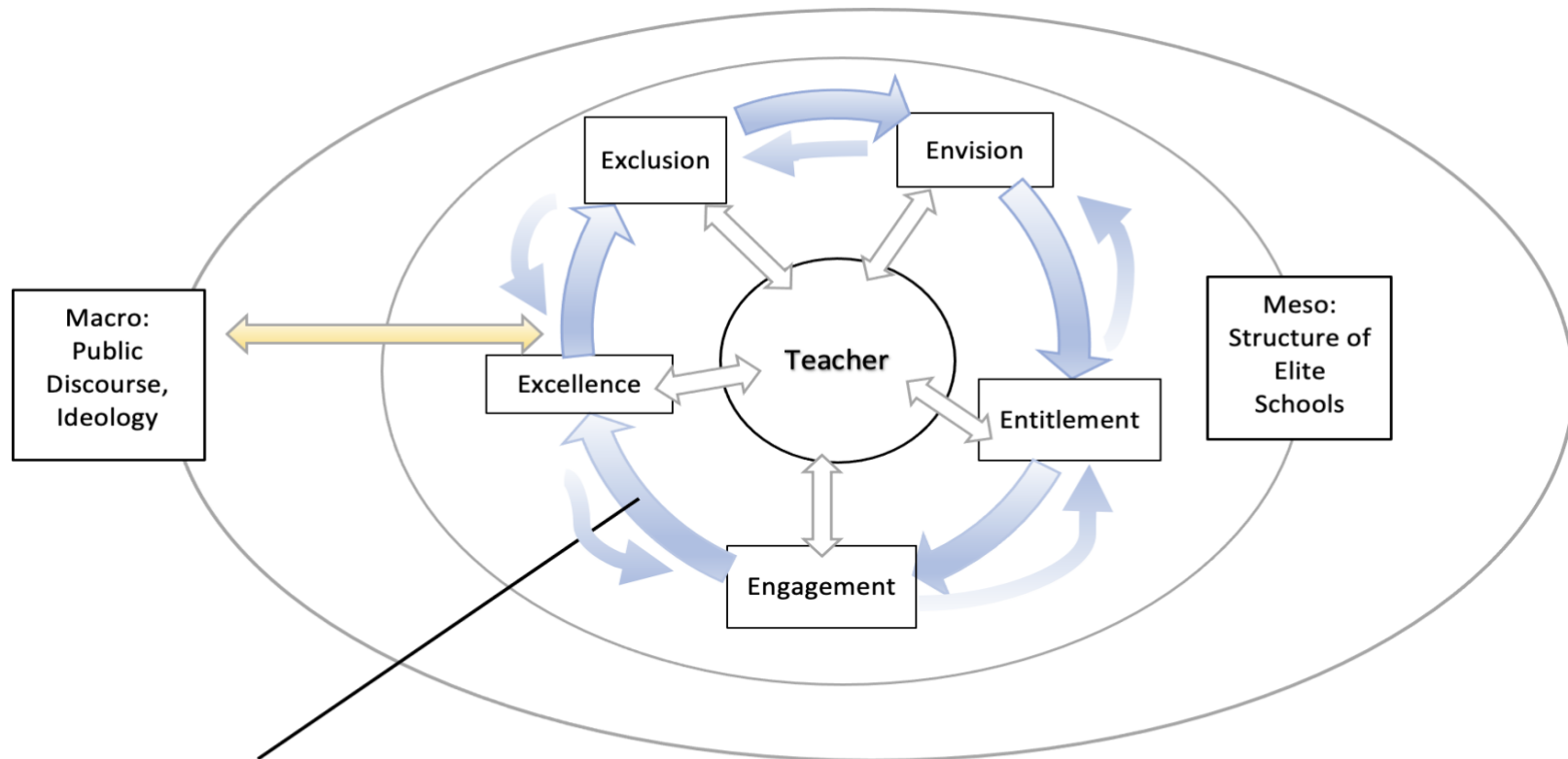
*Entitlement* is about securing the advantages of attending an elite school, whether by using the resources available during their time as students or by accessing the existing social network outside the school upon graduation that offers an abundance of opportunity. Ultimately, entitlement entails the student exercising agency to leverage the resources that are given to them. Entitlement can appear in a variety of school spaces and is not limited to assessments and grading, but can appear in other resources via relationships and school programming (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a).

Finally, *Envisioning* is a process that allows students to imagine their elite future, which begins when they enter an elite school, followed by students taking actionable steps obtain what they need to apply to reputable postsecondary programs. Students become accustomed to achieving success and assuming leadership roles to prepare them for positions of authority beyond university (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Furthermore, envisioning an elite future also subscribes to whiteness or proximity to whiteness (Gaztambide & Agnod, 2020), as well as heteronormative ideals about one’s place in the world.

The Five Es are not mutually exclusive, but rather work together to understand how privileged self-understandings come to fruition in the elite educational landscape. For Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a), exclusionary ideas are based on the ability to demonstrate engagement at school and showcase excellence, which then becomes central in producing a sense

of entitlement or the ability to envision an elite future. I have represented my own use of this framework visually in the diagram below (see page 39). However, I have modified this framework to apply it to teachers' places within this process. The teacher is placed at the centre, with the five expressions of elite identity surrounding it. Since teachers are often subjected and positioned by the dominant class, these markers of elite identity become a lens to examine how teachers experience privilege in the system. The two-way yellow arrow illustrates that the macro (and meso) structures help to create the elite spaces and that the ways in which individuals express and perform the Five Es also create the larger structures at work. The blue arrows reflect the processes at work on a micro level in the teachers' involvement with elite identities. It illustrates the ways in which ideologies circle or are embodied in the work environment. Specifically, this framework considers how teachers' responses, decisions, and actions support or can be seen as an attempt to reject privileged identities of students (or their families). It also considers the possibility of teachers adopting elements of these identifications themselves. This includes things such as dialogue, teaching or coaching practices, emotional experiences, teacher-teacher relationships, and moments of tensions in various spaces and interactions. I seek to understand how teachers are both marked and implicated by this process in their daily work. Simultaneously, this endeavour expands our understanding of the nature of privilege by considering how it is interwoven in numerous spheres within the school environment. This description has been visually represented on the next page.

**Figure 2.1** *Representation of Theoretical Framework*



Micro: The blue arrows reflect the ways in which aspects of elite identities circle the work environment through teachers' experiences, responses, and actions in relation to students, colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders in elite schools. The 5 categories are the framework to think about the ways in which teachers may challenge or support privileged understandings of their students or potentially adopt or resist their own privileged self-understanding. This is the primary object of study.

### ***2.4.1 Summary***

The theoretical framework for this study is situated in critical theory in its aim to think about the transformative potential of the elite private education system. The aspects of elite identification originally designed for students (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a), are applied to teachers' work to understand how they support, maintain, or challenge students' privileged self-understandings or adopt their own as educators.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This dissertation explores teachers' experiences in the elite private education system to think about the explicit and implicit ways privilege takes expression. Recall that two questions frame this: How do teachers working in elite private schools perceive and negotiate privilege in various spaces? How might these teachers' experiences engender privilege or how might they challenge it in their everyday practices? As I sought to uncover the nuances of privilege in elite schooling contexts, qualitative methods were best in service of this goal. I employ a phenomenological lens in how I treat the data concerning the lived experiences of educators, and particularly I align with Finlay's (2012) approach. Finlay (2012), in her consideration of the defining characteristics of a phenomenological lens, proposes:

My own position on this question is that phenomenological research is phenomenological when it involves both rich description of either the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon...I have concerns about research which purports to be Husserlian when, for example, there is no evidence of any reductions being attempted. Similarly, researchers who claim to have bracketed and, therefore, transcended their assumptions while using a hermeneutic approach would seem to be both naive and confused. (p. 19)

My study seeks to access the experiences of my participants and places primacy on teachers' voice. Particularly, interviews were deemed a necessary conduit to access teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and self-understandings that emerge during their experiences in the work environment, as they are objects of investigation that cannot be fully realized through

observation. A series of three in-depth interviews yielded rich data due to the space they provided participants to visit and then revisit experiences through the lens of privilege in multiple contexts. Thus, the following sections will speak to the methodological approaches I employed in this study by outlining my research design, instruments, methods of analysis, and ethical considerations.

### **3.1 Participant Selection Process and Criteria**

The recruitment process sought eight middle and secondary school teachers (grades 7-12) who had experience working in elite private schools in southern Ontario. Interviewing teachers in affluent schools and/or students, parents, and administrators in elite private schools was outside the scope of this study since I focused on the understudied area of teachers' experiences in elite school communities. Secondly, it is important to note that charging tuition does not necessarily produce an elite institution, as there are privately funded schools that are newly emerging and less established, and many do not have the resources (i.e. geographic or scholastic) or cultural capital to be classified as elite. Therefore, participants with experiences in Southern Ontario schools with membership to the CIS and/or CAIS were selected, as affiliation with these governing bodies subjects them to regulatory practices that ensure that schools are typologically, scholastically, historically, geographically, and demographically elite (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b), and therefore, are relevant for this study.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, educators that had at least one year of teaching experience or one year working in an elite private school affiliated with CIS and/or CAIS in a teaching capacity (i.e. coach, librarian, spiritual director, learning resource teacher) were considered for this study. A minimum of one year was deemed appropriate so that teachers would have had exposure to the

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<sup>5</sup> Revisit definition of elite private school in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1 for further detail and explanation of term.

full cycle of the school year. This exclusion criteria allowed participants to consider how myriad relationships and school dynamics unfold according to the time of year (report cards, parent-teacher interviews, sport seasons, extra-circulars etc.) The aim was to recruit teachers who are currently employed in the elite private education system, however, teachers who previously worked in the private system within the last three years were included as well. These teachers brought richness to our discussions given their capacity to share comparative experiences, as well as the level of candor that comes with no longer being in the work environment that one is discussing.

I did not recruit participants through public announcements of the study (digital or print flyers, social media posts etc.) as teachers were asked to discuss their work environments, which are not typically unionized. Prospective participants may have been less likely to participate or share honestly if the study were publicized or if a connection could be made to their personal participation in the study. Rather, I used snowball sampling (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017, p. 38), due to the difficulties of ‘studying up’ or accessing elite communities (Seidman, 2019). This process allowed me to narrow my focus exclusively to my targeted demographics. Secondly, given the power dynamics that interviewers and participants are entangled with, “the demand of equity in the interviewing relationship calls for peer access whenever possible” (Seidman, 2019, p. 52). If educators perceive official sponsorship from someone of authority in the community, like the principal, teachers could feel pressured to participate (Seidman, 2019). There is also the risk of elevating the status of the interviewer because of this perceived sponsorship. Since my prior and current experiences are in the private education system, I relied on pre-existing relationships and contacts to branch out to educators to participate in the study. A brief description of the study was shared with participants via email attachment as part of the snowball

sampling process (See Appendix A).

### **3.2 Overview and Description of Participants**

This study sought participants with a range of extra-curricular involvement, work environments, years of experience, and identity markers (race, gender, and sexual orientation) to highlight facets of the elite school environment over space and time and to examine how experiences with privilege might differ from an intersectional perspective. However, due to the interest of participants, homogeneous demographics of the elite environment, and access to teachers, there were limitations in the extent to which a diverse perspective could be represented. Seven of the eight participants were White; there was one racialized and one queer teacher who participated in the study. Although there are only a few voices from minority groups, their testimony is invaluable in offering a poignant and diverse perspective in relation to privilege. The participants of this study reflect the voices of four males, three females, and one person who identified as non-binary. Participants held a range of subject specialties, extra-curricular involvement, leadership at school, and years of teaching experience. Through the eight selected participants' reflections, thirteen different elite private school environments were represented in the data.<sup>6</sup> The following chart will provide an overview of each participant in this study (See pages 46-47)

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that schools were not the unit of analysis, but rather, it was teachers' experiences that were the primary focus. Therefore, this study did not need any resources from any school at any time.

**Table 2***Overview & Demographics of Participants*

	Participant's Pseudonym & Subject Specialities	Roles/Responsibilities	Identity Markers	Class (self-described)	Total years of teaching experience	Years teaching in elite private school(s)	Number of elite schools participant worked at	Attendance at elite private school as student	Children attend private school:
#1	James  <i>English and Geography Teacher</i>	-Coach: Track and Field -Debate Club Moderator -Public Speaking Facilitator	White cisgender male	Middle	6 years	6 years	4 Schools	No	N/A
#2	Shay  <i>Philosophy, Social Science and English Teacher</i>	-Department Head -Coach: Basketball, Volleyball -School Committees focused on policy and equity	White cisgender male	Grew up working class, now upper-middle	30 years	13 years	1 School	No	No
#3	Jeff  <i>Social Science and English Teacher</i>	-Coach: Basketball, Track and Field -Debate Club Moderator -Public Speaking Facilitator	White cisgender male	Middle	21 years	19 years	2 Schools	No	N/A

	Participant's pseudonym	Roles/Responsibilities	Identity Markers	Class (self-described)	Total years of teaching experience	Years teaching in elite private school(s)	Number of elite schools participant worked at	Attendance at elite private school as student	Children attend private school:
#4	Christopher  <i>Physical Education Teacher</i>	-Coach: Basketball - Athletic programming and mentorship for students	Black cisgender male	Middle	10 years	10 years	1 School	No	No
#5	Jesse  <i>Math and Science Teacher</i>	-Coach: Track and Field -Theatre & Drama Moderator - Facilitator of Equity and Inclusion groups - School Committees focused on equity and inclusion	White non-binary	Middle	4 years	4 years	2 Schools	No	N/A
#6	Fiona  <i>Social Science &amp; English Teacher</i>	-Department Head -Coach: Track & Field -Support for English Language Learners -Lead for Social Justice Initiatives	White cisgender female	Middle	23 years	14 years	4 Schools	No	Yes, reduced tuition

	Participant's pseudonym	Roles/Responsibilities	Identity Markers	Class (self-described)	Total years of teaching experience	Years teaching in elite private school(s)	Number of elite schools participant worked at	Attendance at elite private school as student	Children attend private school:
#7	Megan  <i>English and Social Science Teacher</i>	-Leader of Arts and Theatre program -Ski and Snowboard Club Moderator	White cisgender female	Middle	8 years	8 years	1 School	No	N/A
#8	Amy  <i>English and Civics/Careers Teacher</i>	-Debate Moderator -Limited extra-curricular experience due to Covid-19 Pandemic	White cisgender female	Middle	2 years	2 years	1 School	No	N/A

### **3.3 Instruments**

The two instruments that I used to collect data were questionnaires and interviews. Prior to participants' engagement with the study, teachers were given the opportunity to ask the researcher questions and once interest was expressed, consent forms were shared with further opportunity for participants to ask follow-up questions (See Appendix B for consent forms). Completed consent forms were stored on a password protected device to which only the researcher only had access. Once consent was given, questionnaires were distributed to participants.

#### **3.3.1 Questionnaire**

Participants completed an informational questionnaire via Microsoft Forms (see Appendix C) that collected basic background information on identity markers and work experiences. The questionnaires provided additional screening to ensure participants matched selection criteria and provided context prior to the interview about work history and teacher responsibilities. Further, the questionnaires helped to direct follow-up questions about specific experiences in their work environment.

#### **3.3.2 Interviews**

In-depth interviews were the primary instrument for data collection, and were designed with some important considerations in mind (see Appendices D, E, and F for interview questions). First, Guest et al. (2012) recommends testing the research questions with individuals from the target population to ensure clarity and alignment with research objectives. Given my role as a teacher in a private school, this was a tool that I employed for accuracy and to ensure the clarity and quality of questions. Three teachers from the target audience who were not part of the study were asked to pilot the questions. Secondly, to complete ethical and accurate

interviews, I followed Seidman's (2019) assertion that "interviewing is both a research methodology and social relationship that must be nurtured, sustained, and then ended gracefully" (p. 101). Rapport building is an essential element of establishing a research relationship to allow the participants to feel comfortable sharing, but distance also must be maintained to ensure that participants share what is within their realm of comfort, rather than feelings of obligation to a perceived friend. To build rapport, informal and general questions were asked about the teaching profession, before proceeding to the more focused questions of the study. To maintain distance, neutrality, and uphold the integrity of the study, I reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the study and refrained from sharing personal information or my opinions on the topics. However, given my role as an insider in the elite environment, there were three cases during the interview process where participants directly and explicitly asked about a policy or practice in the school where I currently work. It is only then that I provided a description of my experience with the school's practice. For example, one participant asked me how marks were reviewed for senior level students, and I explained it was looked at by both teachers and guidance counsellors more closely around reports cards submissions and university applications.

I followed the in-depth interview process proposed by Seidman (2019) to model my interview protocols and process. I conducted three interviews between 75-90 minutes in length, with eight educators who have worked or currently work in an elite private school, producing a total of 24 interviews. The questions were semi-structured and open-ended which allowed for follow-up questions that helped participants elaborate on topics that were of interest to this study. Due to the large volume of data, interviews were transcribed with the assistance of transcription software, NVivo.

The first set of interviews took place in June and July (2021) and were focused on

learning about participants' contexts as well as their current and former work environments. This involved understanding how each participant entered the teaching profession and specifically, the private school system, the environments that they worked in, and their approach to teaching. Reconstruction of experiences helped to provide context to the participants' work, including the cultures of the schools but also their own ideas, beliefs, and philosophies of teaching in relation to their work environment(s). At the end of the interview, they were reminded of the focus of following interviews as indicated on the signed consent form.

The second set of interviews took place in July and August (2021). A summary of the previous interview was shared prior to commencing the interview. The purpose of the second set of interviews, as proposed by Seidman (2019), is to look at the lived experiences of the participants in relation to the topic of study. During this part of the interview process, I asked participants to think about various work-related experiences impacted by privilege by talking about their daily interactions with both academic and non-academic aspects of school life, expectations, social conventions, requirements, and relationships (i.e. discipline, social media, extra-curriculars, parent relationships). At the end of the interview, they were also reminded of the focus of the final interview as indicated on the signed consent form.

The third set of interviews took place in August and September (2021). I asked participants to reflect on the meanings of said experiences. Themes, topics, and direct quotations from the first two interviews were shared with the participants during the third interview to check for authenticity, accuracy, intended meaning, and opportunities for further reflection. Furthermore, a critical paradigm is fuelled by its aim to transform, therefore, the methods used for this study were aimed at encouraging reflection, mutual learning, and encouraging self-awareness over complacency (Fossey et al., 2002). The third interview also provided the

opportunity for “participants to reconstruct their experience” within the lens of privilege (Seidman, 2019, p. 14) by also asking them to think about ways in which they may benefit from the privilege of their work environments.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Coinciding with Finlay’s definition of a phenomenological approach (2012) and that of other scholars such as Eddles-Hirsch (2015), I refrain from judgment on the realness of the phenomenon or the lived experiences of my participants, as one of the primary objectives of my study is to bring to light the self-conceptions held by the participants I interviewed. I refrain from imposing external frameworks during the initial stages of data analysis (Finlay, 2012). I use an iterative approach when exploring the data, which creates space for the participants’ experiences to come to the forefront, and it is only once the primary themes are established that I think about how the Five Es (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) come to bear on the data. The following will continue to detail this process.

The initial stages of data analysis looked at early interview transcriptions for patterns, repetitions, contradictions, speculations, and emerging themes within the interview. This was an important step, as immersion into the data beckons repetitious reading, which is salient for finding meaning and patterns (Nowell et al., 2017). These early observations and analysis allowed me to identify areas of interest, which I then brought to the second and third interviews to check for authenticity, to seek clarification, and allow for further discussion and reflection from participants. These emerging themes were examined again at later stages of data analysis once all material had been collected and transcribed.

Once the data collection and transcriptions were complete, I applied an iterative approach to analysis. Iteration is a reflexive process involving multiple encounters with the data, with the

aim of making new insights that eventually lead to a narrowed focus and clear understandings of relationships (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Srivastava & Hopwood (2009) propose three questions that serve as a framework for this type of analysis:

Question 1: What is the data telling me?

Question 2: What is it I want to know?

Question 3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data tells me and what I want to know? (p. 28).

When thinking about the first question, thematic analysis and coding helped to understand teachers' experiences of privilege in elite private schools. To do this, I drew comparisons both within each participants' interview series and between participants' interviews until insights and conclusions emerged. This stage of analysis built on the initial themes and findings completed early in the interview process. NVivo software was used to store data, organize, and code according to these themes. Eventually, these smaller or "basic" themes were collapsed into larger themes or "thematic networks" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 393).

In reference to Question 2, this is where I sought to know how teachers' experiences engender or challenge privilege by considering the Five Es of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Thus, the analytic work of finding the relationship between what the data tells me and what I want to know (Question 3) led to key insights about how privilege is reproduced in these spaces. To clarify, the Five Es of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) were not used to code data, but were considered in relation to coded themes. They helped to form broader conclusions and understandings of how educators support or reject the narratives and ideologies that create privilege identities, whether it is the student's elite identity or their own privileged self-understandings. When there were seemingly contradictory findings, this

iterative process was applied again to understand the relationship or account for incongruity. In some cases, an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991) was used to supplement this dialectical relationship.

### 3.5 Validity <sup>7</sup>

In order to ensure that the evidence collected is trustworthy, the following steps and measures were taken:

1. As mentioned, interview questions were piloted by three different participants who matched the selection criteria of the study. The interview questions were piloted by teachers who were not included in the study. This helped me to practice, be aware of, and refine my interview skills, and aided in the design of questions that were better aligned with the objectives of this study.
2. Holding interviews offsite was not only in line with the research goals, but it is also more conducive to creating an interview environment that supports the comfort of the participant. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and participants selected a location of their choosing.
3. During the interviews, participants were given space to identify anything that they did not want to be presented in the findings of the study or were able to express how they wanted identifying features to be changed. I took note of the participants' requests and applied it in the representation of data.

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<sup>7</sup> I recognize that there is disagreement in academia as to whether the notion of validity should be used in qualitative research. Although some refrain from its usage (see, for example, Mishler (1986) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)), this study is aligned with works such as Seidman (2019) and Creswell and Miller (2000) in the use of this term.

4. Participants' responses were paraphrased back to ensure that I understood the meaning during the interview process.
5. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything that they wanted to share that may have not come up or did not have the opportunity to share in the interview process. In two cases, participants used this space to clarify or elaborate further on ideas. These additions were transcribed and reflected in the data.
6. Three interviews with each participant over a 4-month period gave me the opportunity to check in with participants multiple times. Questions were repeated in the interview or follow-up questions were used to check for authenticity and understanding. Although this happened to a certain degree in all interviews, interview three was specifically focused on checking for validity and authenticity of themes, topics, and quotations.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ensuring the dignity of each person is the primary principle for ethical considerations, from which all subsequent practices and procedures derive. First and foremost, it is imperative to acknowledge the power dynamics within the interview process between researcher and participant; the role of the researcher grants a particular authority over participants. It is therefore necessary to try to ensure that the process is equitable at all stages, which involves maintaining consistency with established agreements during the consent process. An important part of my process was ensuring that consent was freely given at the beginning and during all stages of the interview process by reviewing the consent forms to ensure participants understand all aspects of the form and by providing reminders of agreements during different parts of the study. I reminded participants that they had the right to withdraw at any time and got their consent to record before each interview.

Interviews were conducted on Zoom due to regional public health authority directives regarding COVID-19 and ethical protocols established by York University during the 2020-2021 academic school year. In conducting interviews in an online setting, I was attentive to what the participants communicated through their facial expressions and body language, so as not to miss key elements of communication and to honour the spirit of the interview process (Seidman, 2019). As well, confidentiality is of utmost importance during and after the interview process. Some participants opted not to use the video feature (however, I always kept my video on for the comfort of the participant). Nonetheless, audio recordings were stripped from the files, and video images were discarded. The interviews were stored on a secure server and on a password protected device. Interviews were stored using NVivo software and parts of the interview were also stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only I know the password. Identifying features have been removed from the data and some details were altered to further protect anonymity. I created a pseudonym key for all participants' names and the names of schools where participants work are kept electronically on a password protected device. The data will be destroyed by September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Furthermore, being a novice researcher, I participated in a study with the objective to go through the process of being a participant prior to conducting my research to cultivate a sense of empathy and better understand the position of the participant. I took notes of my experiences so that I was cognizant of the possible feelings my participants may have.

I also recognize the emotional subject matter that comes into play when discussing the work environment, as not all experiences that were brought forward were remembered in a positive light. A salient part of maintaining the dignity of the human person is to be mindful and sensitive to how social identities such as gender, age, race, class, linguistic differences, sexual

orientation affect participants' experiences of privilege. Although there were not any cases that were obviously emotionally taxing for the participant, I provided space for participants to process experiences and emotions. This was done by acknowledging the difficult nature of the situation, if applicable, not rushing to the next question, leaving room for silence, and giving the participant space to elaborate only when and if comfortable to do so.

Reflexivity is about self-awareness as a person engages with research tools, such as reflections, interviews, or observations. It is about critical examination of one's preconceived ideas and worldviews that lead to habitual ways of thinking and doing (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017, p. 9). Given my role as both insider and outsider to the elite school community, it is important to be aware of my own thought patterns that grow out of my experiences. Given my own intimate involvement within the topic, during the interview and subsequent analysis, I kept notes to reflect on my own experiences of the work environment. In doing so, it helped me to be aware and more critical of how my own involvement in the work environment influences how I construct meaning or how I approach an interview.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This section outlined the methodological approaches that I used in this study by discussing participant recruitment and selection, the data collection methods that I used, the process of data analysis, and ethical considerations. The following three chapters will delve into the findings of this study. Chapter 4 elucidates the ways that teachers take part in creating privileged self-understandings of the students in their care, despite attempts to engage with and confront privilege in the school environment. Thus, teachers attempt to challenge privilege, yet it will be shown that doing so does not change the institutional structure. Therefore, they maintain (abide by formal and informal practices) or support it (create new opportunity for identity to be

enacted) according to the five components of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Chapter 5 focuses on the ways that teachers adopt privileged self-understandings when it comes to exclusion, engagement, and excellence; that is, the elite teacher is deeply bound to teaching the elite student, therefore, it influences the ways educators feel responsible to teach or define their role as educator. Chapter 6 will demonstrate how notions of inclusion and exclusion not only shape relationships amongst students but also relationships and roles between educators in the school environment.

#### **Chapter 4: Teachers Maintain and Support Students' Privileged Self-Understandings**

The primary focus of this section is to elucidate the ways that teachers take part in creating students' privileged self-understandings despite attempts to engage with and confront privilege in the school environment. I propose that this occurs because educators feel they can teach about the topic, but they are unable to challenge the privilege that pertains to the students or the parents. In other words, they are only able to engage with privilege when there is a cognitive distance between the teacher and privileged subjects by intellectualizing the discussion. This cognitive distance can be conceptualized as "I am talking about privilege as a subject in school" versus "I am addressing the privileged subject in this school."

Specifically, this chapter will show that teachers engender students' privileged self-understandings in their daily work and interactions within the school community by maintaining and supporting the five components of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Although expressed differently according to context and experience, all study participants demonstrated this to be true. The word "maintain" is used to describe both the formal and informal regulatory practices teachers abide by that are often accompanied with personal conflict or tension, while the word "support" suggests that educators might also create new opportunities for elite identity to be enacted. This section will also illustrate that teachers' role in the process of students' privileged self-understandings coming to fruition in a variety of educational enterprises such as extra-curricular activities, athletics, parent-teacher communication, student feedback, grading, and discipline practices. While the components of elite identification are helpful in exploring what aspects of identity are perpetuated in these various facets of teaching, at times, forms of parental surveillance becomes a way to understand the mechanisms by which it is preserved. Evidently, there are two opposing value systems that compete for acceptance.

Ultimately, students' privileged self-understandings are reproduced in the school environment because teachers' capacity to disrupt it is limited. Though some of the findings may seem intuitive, as mentioned in Chapter 1, seldom do studies focus directly on teachers' experiences in elite private schools. Also, they tend to offer an oversimplified portrayal of teachers as simply extensions of elite institutions (Kahn, 2011; Kenway, 2018). This study adds to the field by engaging directly with and amplifying the voices of teachers to highlight the complexities, tensions, and pressures that arise in their workplace experiences.

#### **4.1 Teachers' Engagement with the Subject of Privilege**

I would be remiss to not first acknowledge the ways in which teachers are cognizant of privilege and feel a sense of responsibility to engage with it. During the interview process, teachers were asked to first share how they understand the concept of privilege and then speak about how they experience privilege in their respective work environments. It became clear that participating teachers share a common definition of privilege as an advantage that one might have, or the ease of accessibility to resources needed to perpetuate advantage. This definition is grounded in understanding privilege as a possession, something that one *has* based on social location, rather than something that one *is*. Scholars like Goodman (2001), hooks (1984), Jensen, (2005), Johnson (2001), McIntosh (1988), and Wise (2005) conceptualize privilege as a possession, while others scholars view privilege as an embodied identity (see, for example, Forbes & Lingard, 2013; Howard, 2008; Howard et al., 2014 and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a; Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2013). The extent to which my participants engaged with the topic is in service of the idea of privilege as a possession, however, I sought to understand formation of privileged identities according to the Five Es (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). In this study, I do not ignore social location, but think more holistically about how privilege is preserved in elite

schools. I recognize that social location and hierarchical rankings are equated with certain advantages, but I move beyond this definition by focusing on how it shapes one's self-conceptions. Disrupting privilege is not just a matter of teaching a child about disadvantage or encouraging them to share resources so that others may prosper, but it is also about changing the way identity is formed through conscious and critical action in the school environment.

Highlighting this conceptual difference is helpful in more effectively understanding the approach that teachers take when they respond to privilege through lessons, and accounts for part of the reason why participating teachers do not fully challenge students' privileged self-understandings.

Teachers' definitions of privilege influences the ways in which they feel it is their responsibility to shape students as responsive and responsible citizens. Since they see privilege as the advantage one has based on one's position in society, teachers encourage social justice advocacy, curate class activities that draw attention to inequities or encourage moral decision-making to confront privilege. All participants of this study speak to ways in which they attempt to engage with, discuss, and challenge privilege through their work as teachers. Megan<sup>8</sup>, an English and social science teacher, explains how she does a lot of "social justice initiatives" where she "[gets] kids to advocate for themselves and others" and engage with things like "food drives and clothing drives." Shay<sup>9</sup> talks about the ways in which he encourages interfaith dialogue amongst other privately funded faith-based schools and recognizes this outreach as "the most meaningful thing [he] did" due to the homogenous nature of the private school he works in. He rhetorically asks, "when are you going to get those opportunities?" He explains that it is through alternative types of human interaction that students can build empathy, awareness, and understanding of others' lived experiences, which he believes to be important for deconstructing

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<sup>8</sup> White cisgender female English and Social science teacher (8 years)

<sup>9</sup> White cisgender male philosophy, social science and English teacher (30 years)

privilege. For Fiona, a salient component of this task involves modelling appropriate behaviour. She explains that the “teacher is a role model for the student [and] provides some sort of example of morality” and goes on to describe teachers’ place to “walk alongside the student [...] to allow them to be who they are and try to shape them in ways that are going to help them make good choices, not threaten them, or manipulate them into behaving in the moment.” She calls attention to teachers’ role in supporting students to be moral citizens by making good choices.

Furthermore, teachers’ inclusion of topics pertaining to advantage and disadvantage are deliberate and take expression in planned lessons and informal class discussion spurred on by topical events and surrounding public discourse. The teachers in my study had good intentions and a willingness to tackle difficult subjects to help students become responsible citizens for the future. More specifically, Jeff<sup>10</sup> discusses how he was able to bring up inequities in a media study unit during one of his English classes. Students were asked to select a news clip and engage in analytic exercises. Although not explicitly stated in the lesson’s objectives, Jeff addresses the idea of privilege through the intersection of race and class by discussing how Black Americans were represented in a student selected media clip:

And I’m teaching a group of zero Black students in this class. It was mostly White students, and maybe a balance of students of White descent and Asian descent in the same class [...] But then I remember pointing out that the whole purpose of that little video segment that [my students] happened upon, was to show Black people in America as being ridiculous and something to look down upon. And I think [the students] didn’t see it as that. They just saw it as ‘This is kind of funny. It’s kind of funny the way these people are talking and stuff.’ And I said, ‘Let’s go back to the

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<sup>10</sup> White cisgender male; social science and English teacher (21 years)

beginning of it and just show how this is really highlighting the squalid conditions of this particular household'. And by interviewing this one person and choosing that piece of interview footage, they're trying to get you to laugh at that situation, which is a way of establishing dominance over this group. And this family as being a representative of Black Americans. And the students did not see that at all at first when they chose it. But then after that conversation, they were really aware of that. And so, it kind of happens in these dealings with things that are out there right now.

Within this informal space, Jeff finds an opportunity to engage students in salient questions surrounding identity, media, and privilege, particularly questions around what story is being told and who has the opportunity to tell it. In his discussion with students, he demonstrates a willingness to engage with questions of privilege and is critically aware of how privilege can manifest through the intersection of race and class. He calls attention to the narrative of dominance and disadvantage placed on Black Americans through the selected media footage. Through engaging in an academic exercise, students are invited to understand implicit forms of racism that exist through various modalities.

Similarly, Jesse<sup>11</sup> takes advantage of opportunities to discuss privilege by thinking about who sets the foundation for the math curriculum. When asked to reflect on the ways they might teach about or challenge privilege, Jesse describes how they encourage students to think beyond the dominant narrative in mathematics to adopt a critical reading lens:

I build in activities so that students can see that maybe this White person who was traditionally credited with this actually didn't come up with this theory or came up with it at the same time as someone else. But they're given credit because they were

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<sup>11</sup> White nonbinary math and science teacher (4 years)

European and wealthy and had the ability to print or publish or whatever that may be. And, you know, little things like, I teach at a very specific theory in math that assigns a problem called the Chinese postman problem. Why is it called the Chinese postman problem? Some people have moved to calling it the route inspection problem instead. I tell them traditionally it's been called this. Why would it be called this? Does being Chinese have anything to do with this problem? No. So we're going to call it this instead. But in your textbook, you may see this instead. And so we're getting to that critical reading lens, where they're reading for bias, they're reading for like validity in their reading, for accuracy and then they want to go out and do that learning themselves, and they come back to me and say, 'Oh hey, I read a thing about this person who also had this theory come up at the same time, but they weren't credited with it because they were in Asia or they were in Africa. And it's reflected in this tool that was found.' And I think this is really cool. And I'm like, 'Wow, that's really, really cool'.

Jesse finds ways to analyze and bring attention to privilege even in a subject where the curriculum does not demand that inequities be addressed. They show how Western ideals, theorists, or ways of knowing are privileged over other voices and work to expand students' conception of privilege by encouraging students to be critical of the curriculum. They ask students to think about how certain identities are represented in mathematics, and therefore, how Western thought has historically monopolized academia.

It is the personal approaches, lessons, and resources used for building responsible leaders that teachers perceive the greatest agentic capacity. These individual capacities serve as a vehicle for educators to highlight advantage or conceptions of privilege based on social location and asks

students to have a critical awareness of it, as illustrated by the discussion of inequity around race or Western ways of knowing addressed in Jeff and Jesse's respective classrooms. As well, discussing privilege becomes a safe task for educators because it is intellectualized or made as an issue 'out there' that the class has a responsibility to understand so they can help, amend, or dismantle. In a sense, students have a responsibility and the capability to be responsible leaders to make a difference in the world presently and in the future. These accounts are similar to Törnqvist's (2018) findings during an ethnographic study in a Swedish upper secondary school that specializes in environmental and global issues. She argues that an egalitarian ethos of the school nurtures in students the "individualized belief in the capacity to perform, achieve, lead and make a change" demonstrating that elite education can include ideas that are contrary to the old ethos of traditional elite institutions (Törnqvist, 2018, p. 565). However, while teachers can certainly encourage this ethos, this study shows that it does not necessarily negate or dismantle the privileged self-understandings that are simultaneously encouraged within these elite institutions. I do not mean to diminish the work that teachers do or undermine their work as an essential component for confronting privilege. However, when thinking about privilege as identity, we can see that more needs to be done to unravel its workings. Teaching about privilege or drawing attention to inequity without necessarily challenging the privilege of the students in the classroom is contradictory, where students are learning from how things are done rather than what is being explicitly said or taught.

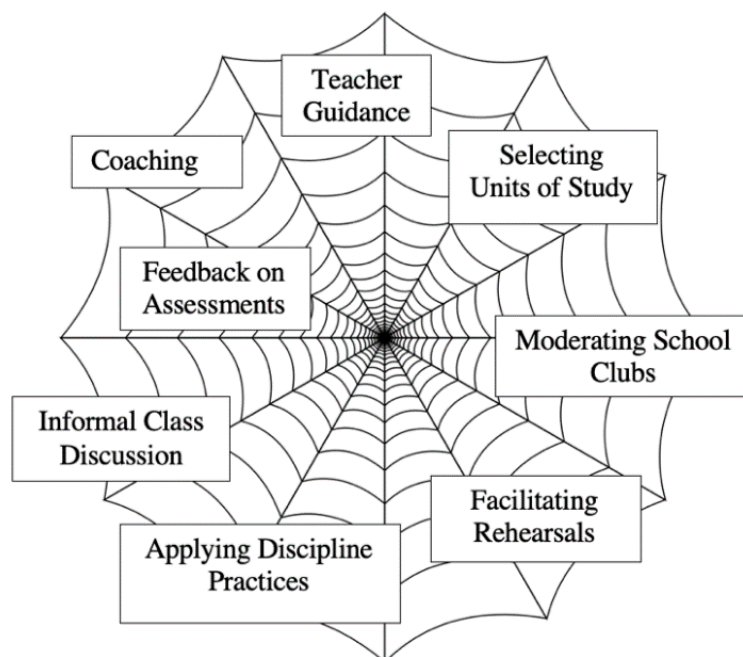
#### **4.2 Although Teachers Teach About Privilege, They Do Not Challenge It**

Despite the examples above, educators often find themselves unable to confront the issues of privilege that are closely wrapped up in the identity of students and their families in various interactions in the school, a finding that is illustrated by all participants in this study. The

implicit lesson that the privileged environment teaches becomes antithetical to the learning opportunities expressed above and the engendering of privilege is still heavily wrapped in the teachers' experience. The making of privileged self-understandings is a web of experiences that link together the educators' various spaces, roles, and tasks. Behaving in accordance with the Five Es is not an occasional act but rather it is an approach or disposition that shapes the way teachers conduct themselves in the work environment. Different aspects of privileged self-understandings weave together and serve as the binding thread between various moments, experiences, and interactions in the school setting in service of elite conceptions of self through the Five Es (envisioning, entitlement, excellence, exclusion, and engagement). I will explore these complexities further in the examples and discussion that follow.

**Figure 4.1**

*Teachers' Web of Experiences*



#### ***4.2.1 Discipline and Extra-Curriculars***

Megan, an English and social science teacher, reflects on her experiences moderating various extra-curriculars at school. She is one of the lead teachers in the performing arts at her current school and discusses how there are rules and limits on how much a student can miss

rehearsal to ensure adequate practice time for both individual and collective performances. One of the consequences for repeatedly missing rehearsal is to reduce the student's role to one that is less integral to minimize disruption to the group, while another consequence might be to ask the student to step down from their participation in a performance, depending on the severity of the circumstance. Megan explains that when students have repeatedly failed to meet expectations, the consequences are often not fully actualized due to resistance from parents. She feels that parental intervention ultimately teaches students to avoid being accountable for their actions and does not prepare them for adulthood:

**Megan:** But for the most part, families make excuses for them. Their kid is perfectly able to tell me why or why not they've missed something. And yet I get this long email from a parent with a whole bunch of excuses and it's like, teach your kid to do this? Teach your kid to advocate for themselves and to navigate the world, and take responsibility for their actions, because you're not going to and they're not going to learn that they are privileged or learn that they're affecting others if you don't let them. And so, yes, there is some resistance.

**Stephanie:** And how do you feel when you hear parents making excuses or justifying behavior?

**Megan:** It infuriates me because it's not doing the kids any favors. It's not teaching them about life. It's not allowing them to make their own choices. It's not allowing them to get back up and develop that resilience and that grit that I think we spoke about last time. They're shortchanging their own kids, and that's so frustrating. They can't see the forest from the trees when it comes to being the good cool parent versus the parent who's going to set up the kids for success and living as an adult.

Although Megan feels that the way the parents handled this situation is not teaching the children about “life” or “living as an adult” as she would know it, it’s certainly teaching students what it means to navigate the world effectively from the perspective of the elite. Megan, self-described as middle class, views the world differently than the world dictated by the realities of the parents’ social class, showing their child the world as they know it. For the parent, it is a world where the system can be navigated and worked to one’s advantage. Particularly, one of the aspects of elite identification is engagement (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) which ensures the right to a plethora of activities. In this circumstance, it means that students are entitled to extra-curricular opportunities offered at school to secure advantage for future endeavours. Similarly, concerted cultivation from parents extends to parental intervention in institutional settings to individualize educational experiences for their children (Lareau, 2003). Lareau (2003) maintains that these practices teach children how to get organizations to meet their individual needs, leading to them gaining social profit and educational advantages. Thus, this parent emailing the teacher is a way they taught their child about working the system to their advantage and ensuring that they are given the things needed to secure this part of oneself; that is, activities are needed to place oneself higher in a social hierarchy and secure advantages such as successful post-secondary applications. A demotion in role or being asked not to participate, are consequences that are both consciously and subconsciously rejected by the parent. Megan, who harbours deep disagreement with the parents’ practices, still perpetuates this aspect of privileged understandings due to parents’ early intervention of missed rehearsals. Although met with frustration and disagreement, she did not challenge the parent, and her decision-making as a lead teacher is in service of elite self-conceptions. In essence, due to Megan’s inability to enforce student accountability, the student is learning what it means to get organizations to meet her

needs despite their shortcomings. In an earlier part of the interview, while describing the private school system, Megan explains that she understands that teaching in an elite private school is about “making the client happy. Rather than, you know, just strictly like a school system.” Her recognition of this could be a possible reason that she feels she must appease the parent, despite her differing beliefs on how to approach this situation. As well, Megan may not take on the task of teaching children to “take responsibility for their actions” due to the tenuous nature of her job that comes from a lack of union protection, which is very common in elite private schools in Ontario. Should a parent complain about how she decides to address the situation, Megan may be left in a position to defend herself or face reprimand from school administration, which is something that has happened to her before, and will be discussed in the example below.

Similarly, in another encounter, Megan discusses her experiences with discipline for the ski and snowboard club at the school. Although Megan is a supervising teacher for the club, discipline cannot be enacted here. Rather than disciplining the child for his failure to follow rules, in a sense, Megan becomes the one disciplined:

[We ask students to be] off the [ski] hill half hour earlier and one of us is waiting in the lodge. They just need to be off so we can make sure that you're on the bus, because it's not fair to the [other] people that are here and their families to have to wait for you.

[One student], and because his parents are divorced, his mom called me, and his dad emailed me. One was like ‘He was only late because he stopped to get a water.’ And I was like, ‘Well, no, he specifically told me that he got off the hill at 8:30, stopped to get a water and then came. That caused him to be ten minutes late. They're supposed to get off the hill at 8:00 to give them the time to get their water and make it to the bus because there are people waiting on him.’ Then the father called me and said that I

yelled at his son in front of the entire bus. First of all, I met his son in the parking lot. He was by himself. And I said, why are you late? We've been waiting for you. You're ten minutes late. You know, that's not okay. What's your excuse? Explain it to me. No, in no way did I yell, in no way do I say anything. So this kid twisted everything. This then went further where I get an email from the head of school saying, 'Are you available for a conference call?' Yeah, with the parents. I had to spend another evening at the school with the head of school and the principal and these two parents on a conference call yelling at me about their son and how it's unfair.

Thus, the student who was late was not disciplined. He was not spoken to by administration, not asked to apologize to the teachers or students for being late, nor asked to serve a detention. Instead, Megan is called into the office and is reprimanded by the parents, affirming the family's agency due to privilege rather than her own. When she tries to challenge the parents' entitlement to have their child be free of responsibility, she quickly receives backlash, and is put in a position where she is meant to defend herself. In this instance, disciplining or requesting reparation undermines conceptions of excellence, which would place a blemish or a mark on envisioning an elite future (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Since excellence is a component of elite identification, actions that are in opposition to this conception become a point of contention. The way discipline is avoided by the parents and projected onto Megan is a means to restore and secure aspects of identity that are integral to their elite status. Consequently, it also restrains Megan from fully actualizing a lesson that she hopes to impart to the child. She describes that her intention to speak to the late student was to help him draw awareness and have consideration of others' time, because "it's not fair" that "other families have to wait for you." Megan's ability to teach this sentiment was undercut by the parents' strategy to avoid culpability, and instead, it is

the parents' implicit lesson that takes the forefront. In a study of elite schools in Australia, Variyan (2018) also finds that teachers have little agency to enact discipline measures due to "haranguing parents" or "unsupportive administration" (p. 255). Megan, like others in elite private schools, is expected to maintain parents' and students' privileged self-conceptions by not tarnishing ideas the parents may have of themselves or their child through disciplinary measures. Her own identity as a teacher is under negotiation, as she must be careful of how much of herself she is expected to show in this space.

However, in another context, Megan discusses how she facilitated a social justice activity about power and socioeconomic inequities during one of her social science classes. She scattered candy over the class for students to collect within a certain time limit. Students had different resources or obstacles to overcome when collecting the candy, such as plastic bags on their hands, the inability to use pockets to store collected items, the use of only one hand, while others were given additional resources like a basket to help them collect candy while using both hands. These physical advantages and disadvantages during the activity were meant to represent world inequities. Eventually, the amount of candy collected by each student translated to their voting rights and wealth in their fictitious world. She then takes note of the students' reactions when they learn that everyone must complete the same task, but some had less resources, rendering it difficult for some to achieve. While discussing the results of the activity, it initially might seem that Megan feels there is room to disrupt privilege, but I suggest that her questioning of the authenticity of the student learning suggests otherwise:

They're usually open to the discussion. They have a lot of fun with it, and they have some interesting understandings. It's only been once or twice where I've had a student adamantly say, well, 'I'm sorry, I don't care if you have one hand. You can still work

really hard with that one hand.’ Most of them are very open to the discussion, most of them are quick because they do a reflection afterwards, quick at seeing the privilege in their own lives, seeing the things that they take for granted, really and appreciating them, at least what they put in a reflection, as to whether or not that’s true.

Megan recognizes the meritocratic ideas that come out in student responses, that is, the idea that hard work despite disadvantage can lead to success. Although she says only a minority of students hold this attitude, and believes that students grow and reflect, she questions the authenticity of student learning in their final reflections for the activity. Her questioning of sincerity can be understood as a form of acknowledgement that another narrative co-exists in the school where privileged self-understandings are enacted and reinforced, as illustrated by the previous examples. Her questioning also serves as a window into her own perceptions of how much influence she truly has on a student’s upbringing, echoing some of the limitations she has when it comes to disciplining students.

#### ***4.2.2 Submitting Late Assignments***

Christopher<sup>12</sup>, a physical education teacher, has experiences where he has maintained students privileged self-understandings, despite lessons that he crafts to explicitly respond to students’ privilege. He describes, for example, an interaction with a student’s late submission for an assignment. He explains that the day the assignment was due in class, one of his students was concussed during a sports game after school. Although they were concussed after the deadline, the student didn’t communicate any information to him about why the assessment had not been submitted. Due to this lack of communication and because the assignment was not submitted on time, he decided to give the student a zero. Chris explains how the situation unfolded:

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<sup>12</sup> Black cisgendered teacher (10 years)

The student doesn't tell me anything and tells her parents and her parents contacted the vice principal... [The VP] sends me an email telling me that I have to give [the student] a three-week extension to do the assignment. [The VP] hasn't asked me what the assignment was. She hasn't asked me when the assignment was given, when it was due, like nothing about the assignment. She doesn't even know what we're doing in class. You're going to tell me to give her a three-week extension? No problem, I'm going to follow the rules.

Christopher expresses frustration with the vice principal's actions and his need to comply with what he feels to be unfair direction from his superior. Christopher also explains that he found it disappointing that the student went above him, rather than speaking to him directly about the assignment. He said that he felt that the student should have communicated directly to him what the situation was and should have asked for an extension, perhaps with a doctor's note to supplement the request. In a direct effort to combat the way the student went about things, he decided to bring it up in class and shares a lesson on what he describes as the hierarchy of the educational system, for students to understand the chain of commands in the school system. He shares this lesson with the entire class while the student who submitted the late assignment was in attendance. The purpose of this is to challenge the students' way of navigating the system, or the sense of entitlement to academic success without responsibility for one's actions:

I literally had to do a class on the hierarchy of the school in class for these kids to understand that you can't do things the way that you're doing them. It wasn't meant to be run that way. I flat out asked the kids who do you think is at the bottom of the pyramid when it comes to the whole pyramid of education? If you have to list it, who do you think is at the top of the pyramid of a school and who is at the bottom of the

pyramid? And I remember this as clear as day. The kids thought that president was at the top and their parents are right below the president. So, at the bottom were the janitors. That's what the kids thought. They thought...and okay, let's just make this better. And what was even better than that was that the kids were above the janitors...And I was like what?

In this instance, the teacher is aware of how students perceive themselves within the hierarchy that exists within the school, placing parents above the principals and teachers. It is only the president of the school that is above parents. Christopher makes a deliberate attempt to do something about it in the classroom. Reay (2004) and Koh (2018) describes this idea of the permeable habitus, in that there are opportunities for agency to be enacted even within what may seem like prescribed ways of being. Christopher attempts to disrupt the students' conception by offering a new understanding of the education system by explaining that parents should not be part of the hierarchy or placed at the bottom because they are "not technically part of the education system", in that, they are not employed by the school. He tells students that when there is an issue with the assignment, they should speak to the teacher first. However, his role as teacher is not entirely under his control in his efforts to combat this. Despite this direct confrontation, his compliance with the vice principal supports the student's narrative that students are not to be reprimanded or to be inhibited from resources or rules that are meant to ensure excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). As well, the overall success the student had in not being penalized by the teacher reinforces the students' conception of the hierarchy of the education system. Specifically, Christopher's actions communicate to the students that despite what they are being told not to do, the student's actions yields the results that she wanted. Like Megan, Christopher must negotiate how much of his value system he can act upon. While he

tries to rectify the situation through a classroom lesson, he cannot fully act in accordance with his own beliefs because of his need to comply with the vice-principal, who Christopher perceives to be under the influence of the parent.

Despite attempts to exert some agency with this incident, Christopher's own recognition of his difficulty to modify the system came forth in a later interview. Christopher sees this challenge most vividly in his role as basketball coach. Like Megan, he questions his ability to make a difference in altering students' understanding in the work he does because of outside narratives that exist in the students' lives.

But the majority of them, they think it's just a basketball thing. They put it in a box. This is not life. [...] As much as you always try to draw that parallel to life, it's just a basketball program. And it wasn't necessarily transferring the way that I would have preferred to transfer from program to program or from program to school, then from school to life. And I think part of that has to do with the other things that are being fueled from the outside, because there is only so much one person or one program can teach you, if you're learning other things from the outside. Then if you're learning more negative on the outside and positive on the inside, you're not going to grasp the positive, you're going to gravitate to the negative.

In his role as coach, he questions the efficacy of his lessons and the ability to instill values beyond educational spaces. Christopher understands that his role as educator has clear limits because of competing narratives "fuelled from the outside" and the power these structures have to permeate the lives of students in the school.

### ***4.2.3 Controlling of Ideas***

Amy<sup>13</sup>, in reflecting on her role as educator, likens her position to that of any other teacher. She expresses that “it is to instruct, to help, to provide support, it’s to watch for red flags and report them. It’s to supervise.” As Amy goes on to think more deeply about her role as teacher, it becomes evident that she feels there is more to it, as there is a tension around her classroom instruction. She discusses the limitations and the tension she often feels between her own opinions and parental viewpoints:

I feel like I live with this tension constantly in the classroom because half of me wants to speak truth to power and explain what it means to be an ally in very clear terms. Speak up on social justice issues and sort of make it clear to these kids [that] you have a burden placed upon you because of the privilege that you live with. And you need to rise to that occasion if that makes sense. Burdens aren’t really the right word. More of a responsibility placed upon you. So that’s half of me. And I try to do that as much as I can, especially when things come up in the news. I find that to be the easiest time to address things, when like when George Floyd was murdered or when we heard about the first mass grave at a residential school, when we still thought it was just a couple hundred kids and two thousand children that have been murdered[...]And then the other impulse, the other drive is for self-preservation, which I guess is the more selfish drive of, you know, you have a good job, you’re really happy here. You like your colleagues, you like your salary, you like your benefits. Don’t sacrifice everything that you have and that you worked for just to make a political point, even if the point is relevant, because what if that kid goes home and says something to a parent and the

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<sup>13</sup> White cis-gender female; English and civics/careers teacher (2 years)

parent calls the VP and then next thing you know, I'm in the principal's office defending what I said. And I never want to be in a position where I have to defend myself.

Amy expresses concern about sharing ideas that are in opposition to students' beliefs and by extension, those of their parents. She says that she feels that speaking to certain social issues would create tension with the ideologies of a conservative parent community, which could lead to a compromising situation for herself. It would be a point of contention because it would disrupt the notion of exclusion, that is, it is only certain people that are part of the elite group and thus, teachers, due to their differing social class background (real or perceived), are not necessarily part of this world, a world that is privy to power and control. Amy does not perceive her relationship to be a partnership with parents, but more so as an employee of the parents. Amy feels that the parents have the authority to determine what is taught or strongly influence the consequences she receives from administration. Additionally, her experiences censoring herself support students' entitlement and envisioning an elite future (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009), in that students and parents are the ones to have agency, to be in position of leadership, and are therefore in charge of what might be worthy of one's time and attention. This decision comes at the expense of her own agency, and her ability to take on a leadership role with regard to social justice issues. These findings are similar to Barrett's (2017) longitudinal study of a teacher in an affluent school who described a fear of parental monitoring, which influenced the new teacher to make curricular choices that coincided with class ideologies of the parents, and the teacher was careful in how far he pushed differing views (Barrett, 2017). The teacher was cautious about how he presented himself in front of students and other educators, as those relationships often functioned as an extension of parental monitoring. Similarly, Amy exclaims that it is imperative

not to “sacrifice everything to make a political point.” Ultimately, a sense of hesitation around “being in the principal’s office because the kids go home and say something to a parent” is what leads to her censorship.

Similarly, Fiona, a social science teacher, is aware of parental monitoring, which causes her to approach and speak to certain topics with caution. For Fiona, one primary area is discussion around career paths. Fiona<sup>14</sup> describes that sometimes her beliefs do not align with the school:

**Fiona:** But I think there's a huge range for me as to who these people could be upon graduation. And maybe my range of ideas is even broader than perhaps what the school might suggest sometimes. Sometimes my values are not fully in line with my school. And so, I walk quietly. It's outside what I think the scope of the school is, it's not that I actively encourage it, but I don't discourage either. I'm just a little bit more subtle or careful about that.

**Stephanie:** Can you elaborate a little bit more on ways in which your values might conflict with some of the school's values? I know you describe that you have a broader understanding of what success might look like. Can you elaborate on that a little bit more?

**Fiona:** I think two examples that might come to mind is.... I’m becoming more and more convinced that a university pathway is maybe not an ideal pathway for many students, I would have said maybe 10 years ago or 20 years ago, but I'm becoming more and more convinced that many students could follow alternative pathways and probably with the right guidance, be very successful. And I don't know if that's

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<sup>14</sup> White cisgendered female (23 years)

really what my school would want me promoting to most students. I think I would do that on a one-on-one conversation and just say, well, there are other options, but I don't know that I would say that to an entire class and encourage it outright.

How Fiona feels she must carry herself in this space is a dance between her personal beliefs and the institutional stance. Again, elite schools uphold the idea that securing an elite future comes with acceptance to a reputable university, and Fiona believes that alternate pathways are not an idea that she should broadly encourage or share. She must be careful that she does not interfere with how the students envision an elite future (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). She has a sense that certain beliefs are being monitored and must cautiously think about her role in relationship to this narrative. Fiona understands that she must be covert when discussing new pathways and says that she would feel agentic enough to approach it in less threatening spaces, but again, her decisions are still not entirely under her control as she feels she is under surveillance. At a later point in the interview, she explicitly acknowledges that “the parents are paying for a very controlled environment for their child” and feels obligated to maintain the school’s message and the parents’ vision. Maintaining this vision is a driving factor in her decision-making process, and more particularly, defines the extent to which she is willing to openly discuss her viewpoints (Barrett, 2017). Ultimately, she must negotiate how much and in what ways she carries herself so as not to disrupt how students envision an elite future at a reputable university.

#### ***4.2.4 Feedback on Assessments***

James<sup>15</sup>, an English and geography teacher, describes how he had hoped to explore the concept of empathy by diving into a novel that follows a teenage character experiencing socio-economic and racial inequities. In a written assignment based on the novel, a student made a comment about his inability to empathize with the disadvantages and difficulties of certain characters because he comes from a wealthy family that affords him access to a plethora of opportunities and luxurious items, which distance him from the protagonist. Despite being able to select curricular choices about the topic, James felt resigned in his ability to disrupt or change the student's thinking. James describes his experiences:

I just want to clarify, it's not that they can't, it's like they're unwilling or don't want to empathize. It really would depend student to student. Right. In this instance, in the example that I gave you, me having a conversation with the student would have just been a waste of time. But I wrote a little comment, if they read it, they can think about it. But the whole situation, probably because of that person's privilege, would have just been at the end of the day, probably not worth it, to be honest. It would have been like we talked him into it. 'Oh, yeah, okay, sure. Whatever.' You know, and then just leave the room. So in that situation, I didn't really address it besides writing a little bit of feedback on the kid's paper because it just wasn't worth my time. And I honestly knew that me saying anything wasn't going to make a difference.

Here, the child can envision (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) an elite future with easy access to luxurious items to secure his status. James does not feel compelled, nor did he actively look to

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<sup>15</sup> White cisgendered male (6 years)

unpack the nature of the comments with the student, and ultimately maintained the student's self-conception or the future he felt entitled to (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). He felt that the student would not be receptive due to external narratives and circumstances that often comes with a person's privilege. Despite having differing beliefs, James felt it was not worth his effort to act on them because he was up against a more pervasive force in the student's life, which is a sentiment that Christopher also describes. James must contemplate how much of his belief system he can share in this space and ultimately, determines that offering less is the safer option.

#### *4.2.5 Selecting Units of Study*

Jeff<sup>16</sup> discusses his decision to adjust his course by changing one of the units of study for a senior level English course. He explains that due to the reorganization of the school's schedule to allow for cohorting of students brought upon by COVID-19 pandemic, he didn't feel it would be prudent to complete a university application unit since applications had already been completed by the time students were scheduled to take his course. Therefore, he altered the unit of study to offer an exercise that he felt would be beneficial for academic writing in a university context. A student and her parents were unhappy with the change in the unit and accompanying assessment and deemed it unfair to be graded on something different than students the term prior. Jeff takes a moment to reflect this experience:

It made me think about how much freedom I have as a teacher. But then just that sort of, that sense that a student felt entitled enough and the parent felt entitled enough as well, to whatever advantage they thought was coming from their child or the student herself not being assessed on [this new unit]. And this was not just random, its [relevant material] that they were being taught...But just that idea that I'm entitled to

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<sup>16</sup> White cisgender male (23 years)

not be assessed on something if I think it's not fair to be assessed on it. You know what I mean?

Jeff senses that his own freedom is being infringed upon for the sake of the student's and parent's entitlement to the benefits of an elite education and to secure academic excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Furthermore, when asked how the issue was communicated, he describes that it was communicated from the parent to the administration and then "came up from administration through my department chair down to me. And it was I was basically told that I probably shouldn't be assessing [new material], you know, as an assessment of learning." In this instance, it is the student, parents, and administrators that monitor the teacher's behaviour, and essentially, Jeff complies with the direction of his superiors. Jeff is excluded from the decision making (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a), and his compliance shows his understanding of the hierarchical rankings. Further, this top-down form of communication speaks to a sense of entitlement held by parents to their perceived benefits of an elite school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). In the privatized model of education, the parents went straight to the manager to ensure that they removed any perceived roadblocks to academic success. In a later interview, reflecting on this confrontation with privilege, as well as others over the course of his teaching career, he acknowledges the difference between discussing privilege and making a change to privileged self-understandings:

And it's funny because I think it's sort of easy to talk about privilege and the pitfalls of either having privilege or not having privilege. I think we can deal with it intellectually and people can understand the concepts. But then when it comes down to concrete action, especially when it involves the people who are themselves and I'm

including myself, experiencing the privilege, there's very little people I think people are willing to do to give that up. And giving that up is really an important part of any idea of progress in that area. So I think, and this is myself included, that we're willing to acknowledge privilege, we're willing to talk about it, but I feel like based on what I've experienced, people are extremely reluctant when it comes to the way that they benefit from privilege or the way they benefit from entitlement. I think people are very reluctant to make any real changes or even entertain making changes.

While many of the other participants experienced these contradictions, Jeff articulates this distinction most clearly. He previously shared examples of how he was able to discuss privilege according to race and class in a media study unit, yet was unable to do anything about the entitlement from the student and parent experienced in selecting this unit of study. Thus, he affirms the intellectual capacity to talk about important issues but recognizes the difficulty that comes with concrete action to tackling privilege.

#### ***4.2.6 Summary***

In examining the various facets of a teacher's role, it is evident that in informal teaching spaces there are many opportunities where teachers are positioned to uphold students' privileged self-understandings according to the five aspects of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). This happens despite educators' efforts to engage with conceptual lessons around privilege because they do not directly address students' privilege. More specifically, the aspects of students' privileged self-understandings affect teachers' daily work, such as how they operate extra-curriculars, how they can discipline students, what advice they may offer students, or how they plan their units of study. In the happenings of the workday, teachers' choices, preferences, and/or values often become muted, and the way they conduct themselves becomes heavily

wrapped up in reinforcing elite conceptions. My participating teachers hold different positions, have different years of experience and are from different contexts, yet their experiences share a common thread of reinforcing privileged conceptions, partly due to lack of agency, a sense of surveillance, and fear of disciplinary measures in their respective educational environments.

The aspect of exclusion dictates the particulars of a teacher's role and sets clear boundaries in their decision-making process. It is evident that teachers do not rank above students and parents in the hierarchical structure of the school and these rankings come to bear on a teacher's work. Although teachers may have some liberties in the classroom, it is imperative that their choices do not oppose the perspective of the elite. When they cross the line, this is when these boundaries are made most visible in the form of resistance from students and parents. Jeff, despite having seemingly sound reasons to adjust his unit of study, must revert to the original unit plan and accompanying assessment to concede with what the student and parents perceive to be equitable. The encounter leads him to question: "how much freedom [do] I have as a teacher?" The aspect of exclusion unites Jeff's experience with Amy's as she pre-emptively makes decisions that are aligned with the ethos of the parent community as a means of self-preservation. She censors her stance on social justice topics because she feels her perspective would not be favourable to parents. Amy has a sense of how she is expected to act and fulfils this standard at the expense of her own beliefs. She explains that, ultimately "I never want to be in a position where I have to defend myself." Consequently, she harbours internal conflict in her choice to comply because she is not able to "speak truth to power." Despite different circumstances, both teachers understand that there are boundaries they must not cross, and their conformity to these structural standards, whether through corrective or pre-emptive behaviours, maintains the privileged conception of exclusion.

Similarly, engagement in the school community is salient for students to demonstrate their worthiness in an elite community (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). While extra-curriculars are a central part of school life, there are limits on the lessons that teachers can impart to students within these contexts. Confrontations with parents and students are most prevalent when teachers attempt to regulate students' actions. Megan is unable to discipline a student for returning late from the ski hill without receiving parental backlash, which in turn, thwarts the efficacy of the lesson she was trying to teach the student, which was to show the student "it's not fair" to have "other families wait for you". Nor does Megan feel that she can demote a student in the school play, especially after receiving an email from the parent justifying the numerous absences. In both situations, there are interjections from the parent community, because engagement is so central to their self-understandings and shows a students' place within the hierarchical rankings of the school. Megan disagrees with the parents' beliefs and actions, but complies, largely due to fear of reprimand. With administration siding with the family, there is little capacity to offer a counternarrative, and Megan's value system is secondary to that of the parents.

Students' demonstrations of excellence, whether academically or through school involvement, heavily contest and shape teachers' work in elite spaces. Christopher, a physical education teacher, cannot penalize a student for handing in a late assessment due to a parent complaint and administrators' subsequent support of the parent. Similarly, Jeff is subjected to the same forms of surveillance when attempting to alter his unit of study. The teachers are unable to enact what they feel is the proper course of action because conceptions of excellence are strongly guarded and used as the guiding principle in correcting teacher behaviour. Entitlement to securing the advantages of attending an elite school is elucidated in both these situations as well. Students felt entitled to what they perceived as the benefits of being at an elite school, and their

agency supersedes that of the teachers as a means to secure the results they seek. Again, teachers' way of being in the workspace is largely shaped by these conceptions, and their compliance reinforces the system.

Envisioning an elite future is primarily about students being able to see themselves in their "rightful" place in the world, which is a place of abundance and success at the university level and beyond. This conception, too, dictates how teachers carry themselves as educators. They must negate their own beliefs so that they do not interfere with these conceptions. Fiona chooses to exercise caution when presenting alternative pathways to a university education. She knows not to engage in this dialogue to eliminate the risk of parental backlash because "parents are paying for a very controlled environment." Similarly, James only makes minor attempts to disrupt a student's thinking on an assignment where the student lacked empathy for a protagonist in a novel due to differing social classes. James feels helpless and explains that he does not push things further due to the minimal impact he believes the intervention will have on the student. In both scenarios, the world of the elite comes to bear on how teachers offer guidance to students, who are careful not to muddle the image that students have of themselves. In this sense, parts of the teachers' ethos are dimmed, and are in service of maintaining elite conceptions.

Why are these considerations worthy of time and attention? First, these shared encounters are not merely small insignificant moments, but rather, it is within these repeated actions throughout the ordinary workday that different spaces collectively contribute to the elite private school system and the reproduction of students' privileged self-understandings. Patterns emerge among various actors, and we can see how these elite identities are secured in teachers' behaviours, whether these actions derive out of fear, self-preservation, or a sense of complacency in how things operate. Second, the data has shown that privileged self-understandings place

limits on teachers' moral imperatives and infiltrates how they conduct their work. At times, teachers' actions are not in service of educating the whole child or rooted in a higher purpose. When actions are directed this way, they enforce an individualist self-concept that is about seeking what feels right (for both the teacher and student alike), rather than promoting a way of being rooted in the betterment of the collective. I ask, what are the consequences that come with this way of being and acting? What are the risks of reprimanding Megan for speaking to a student who kept an entire bus waiting? Will she feel free to intervene next time? How would students have benefitted if Jeff was allowed to teach writing skills for a university context? What is lost when Amy does not feel that she can offer an alternative perspective on social justice issues? Does censoring teachers get in the way of democratic education? What is forgotten when Fiona can't share alternative pathways to success? When we think about what cannot fully come to fruition, the gravity of the small moments becomes more lucid, and offers an understanding of some of the ways the system maintains dispositions and understandings that are not in service of a greater purpose. These are dispositions that cannot be solved with donating money to a charity or learning about a Eurocentric curriculum in math class. They are happenings that bear on one's self-conception, and therefore, growth calls for work that is rooted in formative experiences that call students out of this way of being. The following section will continue to focus on the pervasiveness of teacher censorship, especially in the context of assessments and grading.

### **4.3 Assessment and Grading Practices**

Academic success is strongly tied to envisioning an elite future and is deemed integral to the notion of excellence when thinking about conceptions of privileged self-understandings (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Marks are typically used as indicators of self-worth and acceptance to the elite community and are needed to secure elite status or envision a future in a

prestigious university with the eventual goal of obtaining a lucrative profession. Due to the centrality of academic success to privileged self-understandings, grading assessments is frequently a site of tension and contestation. This finding is consistent across all eight participants. Particularly, I found that:

1. Teachers perceive that students and parents feel entitled to high grades, even without mastering the subject matter.
2. Teachers feel that their grading and assessment practices are monitored according to this entitlement to high grades. This monitoring may happen in the form of negotiation from students, intervention from parents, and enforcement from administration, or different combinations of the actions taken by various stakeholders.
3. Monitoring happens in both external and internalized systems; external systems present themselves in the form of disciplining teachers, whereas an example of internalized systems would be teachers pre-emptively giving higher marks to avoid conflict or by changing their assessment practices to help ensure students achieve academic excellence.

Despite described frustration or disagreement from teachers, aspects of elite identity are ultimately maintained and supported partly due to fear of surveillance. Questionable practices in support of elite conceptions of excellence and envisioning are monitored, perpetuated, and preserved.

#### ***4.3.1 Sense of Entitlement to Expected Results***

James discusses that there is an expectation that grades are granted rather than earned, and at times, subject to negotiation, especially in English class where students feel that assessment is more subjective. He explains:

It's like in English, it's this problem. Because there's no right answer and it's always the lowest mark on everyone's report card. So, there is some negotiation, I think in the older grades. And as I said [...] kids would come to me and be like 'These are the rest of my marks. Why is this one so low?' And just an expectation sometimes that's a little bit above and beyond or a little bit kind of misguided.

James recognizes that part of his work as teacher is to be subjected to some questioning from students even when they may be "misguided." Further, Jesse shares James' sentiments and in doing so, demonstrates that this experience is not necessarily subject specific. Jesse teaches math and science, and sees student entitlement in the subtleties of their language:

[Students] see grades as a value system assigned to them, like they don't see them themselves as like earning a grade, and I think that's reflected in the language. 'Why don't you give me this grade?' Well, you earned that grade by doing this, this, this and this. Right? 'Why did you fail me?' Oh, I didn't fail you, you weren't prepared, right. And it's subtle.

Christopher addresses this result-oriented mindset described by James and Jesse as well, but he discusses it from the perspective of the parent. He explains how often he has witnessed parents expecting their child be given a grade without a change in behaviour. He feels that parents don't necessarily feel entitled to a teacher's extra support to help their child, but rather expect that teachers will increase grades with as little demand on their child as possible:

Let's say a kid is struggling in class and I say to the parents, you know what? I understand Johnny is struggling in class. What I'm going to do is every single day, I want Johnny to come see me after school, to sit down and go through his work for about an hour, hour and a half, every single day to make sure that he gets caught up on

what he's doing and that he's ready for the exam. The funny thing is that's going above and beyond. The teacher's doing everything that they should be doing. But they get pushback. Johnny can't do that every day. Johnny has football. Johnny has to go see his friend down the street. Johnny also had this. How can we do it where it works with his schedule? So, all of a sudden, it's not about above and beyond, it's about how can we get this with the least amount of resistance to the expectation that we want. So, the expectation is a result. It's what the parents are paying for.

Although Christopher speaks in hyperbole, it is apparent that he feels that entitlement to high grades is a reality that governs the relationship between student, parent, and teacher. Amy echoes similar thoughts, and describes that this sense of entitlement leads to hostile behaviour or might place the teacher in a position to have to justify grades, even in instances when the student's academic performance is above the ministry standards (a grade range of 70-79%):

If they don't receive those high marks, they can become antagonistic, or their parents can become antagonistic. And luckily, I haven't experienced too much of this, but it has happened to me. I had a parent in an interview, the student was getting about an eighty-one, eighty-two in my class, and the parents were flabbergasted that their child was not getting in the nineties. And I had to walk them through assignment by assignment and explain, well here's why they're not getting in the 90s. Before they got a seventy-five on this and an eighty-two on this and eighty-four on this. The law of averages says that their mark is an eighty-one. And it was like I was speaking moon-language because the assumption was that I must be doing something wrong because how could this be happening and, 'Well, are you making sure that you're marking the same as the other teacher teaching your course?' and 'Oh well, did you

make all the instructions very clear because my child would not miss any instructions'. And it's sort of this air of entitlement that permeates.

Amy<sup>17</sup> describes that entitlement is coupled with antagonistic behaviour that takes expression through questioning the teachers' ability and professionalism regarding grading assessments. Shay adds something different to this understanding by acknowledging that this sense of entitlement stems from a place of anxiety. His perspective is similar to Connor and Galloway's (2015) findings, as well as Brantlinger (2007) who found that maintaining privilege often comes at the expense of socioemotional health and well-being. While these scholars primarily focus on the student experience, Shay<sup>18</sup> points out that this anxiety is often driven and shared by parents:

**Stephanie:** When you say that privilege fills people with anxiety, how do you see that within your school community?

**Shay:** Because the parents are so concerned that their kid is going to fall through the cracks. [...] We're all playing with the same genetic deck. So, there's this anxiety that's like, 'Oh, you know, our kid despite whatever his deficiency is, because he's our kid, he deserves a certain type of life.' And because the private schools are dependent on tuition, that whole customer-client relationship that the school has to manage, it ends up driving the ethos of the school in a way that the founding philosophy of the school and the mission statement doesn't [hold true].

Shay notices that the anxiety around students' success is a pervasive force and because education is transactional and commodified, teachers often give in to appeasing parents. Thus, teachers acknowledge that the sense of entitlement to grades influences the ways in which they approach

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<sup>17</sup> White cisgender female; English and civics/careers teacher (2 years)

<sup>18</sup> White cisgender male; English, Philosophy, and social science teacher (30 years)

grading and assessment practices, which is a central component of teaching. The following section will further explore the ways in which this occurs.

#### ***4.3.2 Monitoring of Academic Success – Examples of External Forms of Monitoring***

My participating teachers feel that their grading and assessment practices are monitored closely to ensure academic success. Entitlement to ideas of excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) become a driving force for the ways in which parents intervene or solicit help from school administration to challenge teachers' decisions. Teachers become located within the hierarchical structure of the school, whereby they act in accordance with those at the top of the hierarchy. In this case, parents are typically perceived as having power and control and by extension, so do their children. Teachers are often monitored according to parents' desires and must succumb to these pressures. There are instances where parents or superiors will explicitly interject, while there are other times teachers internalize the expectations of the dominant group, in essence, creating a double-consciousness (Du Bois, 2022). The notion of double-consciousness put forth by Du Bois (2022) to describe the experiences of Black Americans, posits that for subordinated groups in oppressive environments, there is a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul" (p.14) The participants of my study show how they are subjected to outward forms of monitoring, but also how they come to look at oneself through the "eyes of others" (Du Bois, 2022, p. 14). While this study will speak to both, this section will first focus on the external forms of monitoring.

James, an English and geography teacher, describes a situation where he did not feel supported in his grading from an administrator in the school after his student's work was reassessed without his knowledge following a complaint from a parent:

**James:** In my last year at [High School X], I had a parent who thought I was not marking their son adequately because he was getting 90s in all his true or false or right and wrong subjects. But in my class, [he] was a very talented English student but just on me all the time to a point that I started doubting my own ability to mark. And I found out later that the principal had another teacher mark all the assignments...that I had already marked. And I think that's very unfair. Especially for a principal who wasn't very engaged in the classroom or knows what was going on. So then pull another colleague in to remark the work that I had marked. When the issue came up, I had [other colleagues] mark the stuff for me a lot of the time, and they marked it harder than I did. But then to just go behind my back and to not tell me kind of what was going on. It's crazy. That's extremely unfair.

**Stephanie:** And why do you think that happened?

**James:** Entitlement from a parent that this is the mark, if my kids getting all these marks and can't get that mark in that cluster, there has to be something wrong with the teacher.

James' experiences monitoring from the student, parent, and administration, and in a sense, his colleagues take part in this monitoring by being complicit with the request to reassess the student's work. This monitoring of grades is similar to what Fiona has experienced in her work environment. Fiona describes a time when she was called into the principal's office while another teacher was disciplined for not having better report card results for a course they both teach:

There was an awkward situation in my second year of teaching, where right after our fall progress reports, I was called into the principal's office with another teacher who had been in the school for several years. I thought she had a senior position over me and she was my teaching partner, but with clearly more experience than me. Her uncle had just passed away and her progress reports were not great, marks were quite low and there was a test that she had given and one of the sections on the test, most of the kids bombed and so marks were like 10 to 15 percent lower than me because it was so skewed in the very beginning. And she didn't really make adjustments and she just nabbed the kids for some sort of application marks. And I think they needed more practice in the application and after the principal kind of questioned this and made it very clear he was not impressed with her progress reports, dismissed her, left me and told me if I saw anything suspicious that I should tell him immediately. I left the room, and she came to me very upset, not understanding why she was disciplined in front of me. And I just didn't say anything. But I was put in a very awkward position. I didn't have full time status yet. I felt like I was being used as a pawn. I had to be very careful about what I did.

Fiona's story is significant because it illustrates that seniority does not necessarily play a role in determining who is disciplined, but rather, discipline is used to preserve aspects of what it means to be privileged, and teachers are expected to comply. Furthermore, at times, teachers are called to monitor colleagues' ability to meet expectations, which is another way they support privileged self-understandings. During Fiona's description of being asked to keep an eye on her colleague, she also recalled a time when she was under scrutiny herself, and felt that she was surveilled by both parents and administration:

There was a parent who didn't agree with my marking, and they were concerned that my marking was low and that this could put their daughter at a disadvantage down the road. This was a grade 10 class. So again, not like high stakes university, but it required me having a meeting with them. [...] And I had to justify my marking [...] [The paper] had a lot of spewing facts back, but not that sophistication that I would have expected to be in the 90s range. I think it came top down. Boom. We want answers. It seemed to be an okay issue afterwards. The principal said she was okay with the way it turned out and she thought that my approach seemed to be satisfactory. But it was very clear that I was in a position where if I didn't handle it very well, that I could be in trouble. This was a family that wanted answers [...] I really didn't feel supported. I felt like the principal was there watching me to see how I was going to handle the situation. And I felt like that was something that could have gone into my file if it wasn't handled just precisely in the right way[...]And I felt like this was a biggie, because here I have mom and dad who were very highly educated, very affluent people from a family that everybody knew. [...] Even if we had met before and maybe the principal had coached me through or asked me a little bit more, but I really felt like I was on my own and this was like a little trial going on. And so that that has stuck with me. I will remember that for my teaching career.

Although Fiona could justify the grade to the parent and the principal in this specific situation, it is these types of difficult experiences that teachers share when making decisions or discussing how to navigate elite private schools. Although all teachers are accountable for their grading and this issue can certainly arise in publicly funded schools in affluent neighbourhoods, the context of the elite school environment creates a more threatening situation for educators. Due to the

consumer dynamic that comes with paying for education directly, parents have more authority in determining which teachers remain at the school, as parent complaints may pressure or influence administrators' decisions whether to renew a teachers' contract because the administration may prioritize keeping the parent community happy so that enrollment remains high. All participants describe navigating parental interactions as important for their professional success to the extent that three teachers of the study disclosed not having their contract renewed at one point in their career due to parental influence. Since teachers working in elite private schools are not typically unionized, they are not protected in the same way that publicly funded teachers would be, and a parent complaint around grading and assessment in an elite private school therefore has more gravity on the outcome of teachers' experiences in particular elite schools. Moreover, in this situation, discipline is framed to 'correct' the behaviour of the educators. Discipline influences their practices and approaches to ensure high grades are the standard to avoid being scrutinized or to preserve their job. Externalized forms of monitoring eventually lead teachers to internalize these mechanisms. Jeff highlights this idea of a double-consciousness (Du Bois, 2022) when discussing the pressure he feels for students to achieve high marks. In his reflections, the source of the pressure is ambiguous; he explains that he is unsure if the pressure that is real or perceived:

**Stephanie:** I wanted to go back to the tension that you pointed out between education and serving clients. What are some of those tensions? What are you referring to when you speak about that?

**Jeff:** It has different faces, and one of them, it shows up around assessments. So with assessments, you always feel like there's a little bit of you reflected in what the marks are. And there's always this mostly unspoken idea that if marks aren't a little

bit higher than even you might think they should be, that there are going to be some repercussions of some kind, whether that comes in the form of complaints from parents or some kind of message is implied or explicit from your managers, your department chairs or your heads of school or whatever. There's always this [pause] ... and again, I don't know exactly how real it is, but it feels like there's this pressure to make sure that students are getting marks that are pretty high, whereas I haven't worked in the public system, but my parents did, and I don't recall them ever once having a conversation even with each other because they would talk shop at home. [...] And they taught for 30 some years and that never once came up. Whereas when I talk to other teachers in the private system, if we can speak freely, that comes up every time, some version of that tension.

Jeff explains that there is an uncertainty of the pressure's source; he isn't sure "how real it is" because it is felt but not always explicitly expressed, yet plays a pivotal role in how he and others are guided to act in their work environment. He anticipates that there will be "repercussions of some kind" from his superiors and other authority figures if the ideals are not upheld. This shows that an explicit form of pressure does not need to be there, and in some ways, he has come to filter his actions through the perspective of the dominant group (Du Bois, 2022). The following section will continue to explore the ways in which teachers have internalized the expectations of the dominant class to support privileged understandings in relation to conceptions of excellence through academic achievement.

### ***4.3.3 Monitoring of Academic Success – Examples of Internalized Forms of Monitoring***

When thinking about internal systems of monitoring, double-consciousness (Du Bois, 2022) supports the understanding of how discipline is maintained.<sup>19</sup> In previous cases, we see direct indication that someone is watching whether it be parents or administration on behalf of the parent, but teachers also come to regulate themselves through anticipating a problem or disciplinary action that might occur. In essence, they are “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”, and in the examples that follow, the ‘other’ is the parent community (Du Bois, 2022, p. 14). Furthermore, in Du Bois’ (2022) account of Black Americans, this dualistic experience gives rise to tension and turmoil, that being “unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (p. 14). Similarly, the educators of this study also experience a warring between their own standards of practice and the demands of their work environments. James when discussing his grading practices reveals the following:

I'm almost more willing to give a couple extra percent so that I'm not getting into a problem. Right. It's like, why give that 70 and then then you're going to receive an email as opposed to giving me 80 and then everything's okay.

James’ anticipation of parental interventions facilitates his willingness to give extra marks so that he is “not getting into a problem.” In addition, James specifically recalls advice from another teacher who encouraged generous marking as a necessary means to mitigate difficulty or resistance from parents, but also to ensure teachers ‘make it’ in the elite private system.

When I when I first went to [High School X], [an experienced teacher] said to me, just lose all your, what's the word? Basically, lose all your integrity right now and

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<sup>19</sup> In making this comparison, I do not intend to liken the experiences of oppression of Black Americans to the experiences of the participants in my study. However, Du Bois’ (2022) notions are used because they are powerful and transferrable in understanding how dominant groups come to bear on the self-conceptions of educators.

everything will be fine. And I hold ninety-nine percent of my integrity still. The one place where I maybe don't hold all my integrity is marks just because it creates conflicts that aren't needed.

James expresses a tension between what he feels is right as opposed to the practices he engages in, however, he ultimately acts against what he feels is right for the purpose of self-preservation.

Amy also shares a conversation she had with a colleague about the moral ambiguity around grading of assessments:

I remember having a conversation with another teacher about this, where we were teaching the same course and she asked me what my average was for an assignment. And I was like, 'Oh, I think it's like a high 70'. This class that I had was always sort of in the high 70s, which felt pretty healthy to me. And she goes, 'Oh, my average is 85'. 'Oh, that's great. You must have like really good kids who did really well in the assignment'. She's like 'Mmm, is it that or is it that I should be giving them seventy fives.'[...] She's also been at the school longer than I have. I can't remember how many years like maybe just shy of a decade. She's like 'Is it that they should have an eighty-five average or have I just trained myself to start marking 10 percent higher than I should be.' I was like 'Well, I don't know the answer to that question'. She's like, 'Yeah, it's best that I don't go down that road.' And I get that. I totally understand that feeling and I'm trying not to let myself end up there.

Amy describes how the experienced teacher questions the validity her own marking of students' work because she "trained" herself to be lax in the way she assesses. Although Amy states that she is trying not to enter this ambiguous space when it comes to grading, she does describe instances where she feels compelled to meet expected standards. There certainly is a sense of

internal conflict or questioning of one's integrity, which seems to be part of 'making it' as a teacher at an elite school. There is less room to encroach on this aspect of elite identification due to power dynamics and the perceived disciplinary action that ensues. Amy also describes how she justifies giving grades that might be higher than she feels is accurate and questions the equity and integrity of her practices:

What happened was the kid got an opportunity to come in and speak with me about the test. We walked through everything that he did wrong on the test. I explained where his answers were lacking, what he needed more of. And I think I ended up sort of balancing that, not completely out of his overall mark, but I weighed it much lighter than some of his other marks where he did well, and part of that is what the ministry recommends that you do, right? Like most recent, most consistent. He wasn't consistently getting 20 percent on things. So, you know, I think it was good pedagogical practice to sort of weigh it a little bit lower. Would I have weighted it quite as low had I been at a public school where I was protected by a union? I don't know. I don't know, because sometimes I don't know where the impulse is coming from. It's so it's so hard to judge. Am I doing this because I'm doing right by the kid or am I doing this because I feel like it's going to be a big conversation if this is the only mark on this kid's transcript under a 70. 'Oh, it's a 68. Okay, can I just find a way to bump them up to a 70 so that everybody's happy'.

Amy questions the impetus and integrity of her actions and describes how her practices as a teacher does not come from direct instruction from an authoritarian figure, but rather it appears to stem from internalization of the hierarchical structure at school. Her judgment and decision-making include the weighing of consequences from the parent community (Du Bois, 2022). She

goes on to elaborate how her practices as a teacher are altered to ensure academic success. She says:

[...] It's not that the marks are told to be inflated. No one ever says you must inflate your marks by 10 percent. It is instead a soft inflation of many, many things that add to this. It's the abundance of extra help sessions that they can attend, which I am in favor of generally, but it's troublesome that it's only accessible to kids that attend institutions like the one that I teach at. So that's troubling. Yes, so that's part of it. It's also, if a student does very poorly on an assignment, they are often given multiple rewrites or re-attempts or perhaps that gets averaged out of their overall mark by the end of the term. So, it's essentially a soft inflation, whereas no one's going into my computer and hiking up each mark by five to 10 percent automatically, but things add together and add together, and add together.

In both testimonies, Amy describes various strategies that contribute to high marks. She preemptively adjusts her grading practices to avoid anticipated future conflict, whether by changing the grade, offering rewrites, or weighing items less so they do not make a significant contribution toward a student's overall mark in the course. It is not necessarily about learning, but rather, the "inflation" is about using strategies to get marks to a level that is acceptable to the parents. Amy must negotiate her practices according to conceptions of excellence because she is also fearful that it may turn into a "big conversation" that speaks negatively to her own expertise as an educator. It is Amy's internalization of parental expectations (Du Bois, 2022), rather than their physical presence, that ensures grades are kept high. In Amy's words, "no one ever says you must inflate your marks," but there is a shared understanding of how things ought to be done.

Megan also discusses how she alters her reporting practices to meet these expectations.

She might delay when and how she includes low grades on report cards to give students an opportunity to redo assessment or demonstrate learning that might cancel out the previous mark.

She describes the following:

What ends up happening is going forward, sometimes we say, 'Okay, we're doing four different activities throughout the next few months, I'm going to drop the lowest mark of your four or here you can do this this worksheet again. And the letter grade won't affect you on this particular report card but might reflect on your final. Or I can allow you to redo three of the ten questions. You can redo three of your worst if you'd like.' So, you kind of break it up in different ways.

Megan employs strategies similar to Amy's to help facilitate successful results. Although she doesn't necessarily question the integrity of her work as a teacher, she does describe other negative consequences that come with this type of behaviour. Particularly, she outlines that some of the strategies she uses, as well as others, leads to a lack of resiliency amongst students:

There's a lot of grade padding and parents and students complaining about, you know, why didn't I get this mark? I need this mark to get into university and so that kind of pressure is there for the teachers to help the student get that, and even if that means sitting down with them and holding their hand as they write an essay, I feel like there's less opportunity for the child to fall and get back up and be resilient because there isn't, it's almost seen as a failure for the students to stumble, and I know that my colleagues hate that as well. They say they want the opportunity for students to be able to stumble and develop resiliency, develop the grit that's needed to face the real world. But the way the system is set up, I feel that they aren't given that much of an opportunity.

Thus, it is not always about learning the material, it is about receiving grades that allow students to “get into university.” Megan recognizes that she must employ strategies that she feels does not allow students to master skills, as there is “pressure” to “hold their hand as they write an essay.” She feels that catering to students’ entitlement to grades and ideas of excellence hinders students from building resilience, an important tool for tackling future challenges both within and beyond educational contexts. It seems she must take part in practices that do not fully align with her beliefs in order to uphold conceptions of excellence. She refers to her observations as ‘a system’ because there is an acceptance, compliance from teachers, and pressure to act due to fear of parental complaint. Shay also describes the tension that comes with grade inflation, but talks about the moral consequences of the system and how it undercuts the heart of the educational enterprise:

So, grade inflation is one of the big propensities of private schools and that derives from the customer-client relationship, which ends up obscuring what should be the teacher-parent relationship. So private schools monetize what should be a relationship where teachers share in the moral mission of helping people to raise and educate their children. But private schools, by monetizing that relationship, inevitably destroy the relationship. We maintain the facade of that as much as we can. And sometimes the moral dimension prevails if the parents are morally exceptional and if the kid is doing well. So it becomes a non-issue. But the moral relationship that should be at the heart of the educational enterprise, ends up being destroyed by the economic relationship that's created as a result of the customer-client model. And we sort of just think like, no, we will be just as wonderful as we were before, but we'll just take money from people.

Shay acknowledges that due to the monetization of education, it is very difficult to offer an alternative mode of education. Monetizing education leads to an imbalance of power, and therefore places teachers in a role where they must cater to parents' demands rather than working toward an authentic partnership. It becomes about ensuring that students are demarcated through demonstrations of excellence or appeasing parents by ensuring they receive what they feel entitled to (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Shay explains that this power imbalance becomes especially apparent when parents' and teachers' value systems are in opposition to one another. In such cases, a teacher's work becomes about securing the elite identity of the parents and students, often at the expense of their moral imperatives. Shay explains that this is a reality of the system that people fall into because of its very design and the pressures that ensue. Amy too recognizes that the system allows for the automatic functioning of success:

But most of these kids have not just supportive parents, but overly involved parents. And that combined with the political power of money and the ability to go to a school where it's set up in such a way to ensure their success, it's very hard to not be successful.

Both Amy and Shay describe inflated grades as part of the culture and environment of elite schooling. There is a sense of acceptance of the way the system operates due to its design, whereby teachers have internalized its mechanisms as part of their practice, which allows for self-conceptions of entitlement and excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) to be supported and instilled in students.

#### ***4.3.4 Summary***

The notions of entitlement, excellence, and envisioning an elite future are the three aspects of elite identification focused on in this section. Specifically, I discussed the ways in

which maintaining students' privileged self-understandings revolves around entitlement to grades and is heavily wrapped up in their want and ability to make claims of excellence and envision an elite future (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Teachers describe feeling surveilled by parents, students, and administration to meet these idealized conceptions of self and their comportment becomes heavily wrapped up in this way of being. When there are instances where educators might stray from the expectations in the interest of personal principles or as an exercise in professional judgment, they are often subject to formal and informal disciplinary actions, where they are put in a position where they must defend themselves or subsequently must concede to the expectations. Further, if students aren't obtaining the grades they want, a teacher's qualifications and capabilities may be called into question. Recall Jeff's concerns that "if marks aren't a little bit higher than even you might think they should be, that there are going to be some repercussions of some kinds." There was also Amy's fear of having a "big conversation" or being accused of "wrong doing" if a student does not receive a grade deemed acceptable by the student or parent. Disciplinary measures change how teachers conceive of their role and how they employ grading strategies. Teachers often undermine their own grading standards, whether they edit or direct their teaching practices to mitigate risk and avoid confrontation and discipline. Amy, for example, looks for ways "to bump them up to a 70 so that everybody's happy." James wonders, "why give that 70 and then then you're going to receive an email as opposed to giving me 80 and then everything's okay." Often, external powers help to ensure that grades are kept at an 'acceptable' level, which diminishes educators' sense of autonomy. At times, teachers' ability to navigate this tension is essential for them to succeed in an elite private school, often at the expense of one's integrity or other recognizable moral consequences. Thus, teachers' negotiation of their work is centered around aspects of

entitlement, excellence, and envisioning an elite future. Teachers often feel they must mute their standards to serve parents' and students' objectives, regardless of whether or not they consider doing so to be moral. Ultimately, it becomes a way exist as a teacher in this space, as teachers utilize strategies to support and ensure student excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). It is utilized so readily, that teachers refer to it as system of which they are a part of, that automatically functions in service of elite conceptions of excellence.

## Chapter 5: The Privileged Teacher Part One

While the previous chapter focused on the ways in which teachers maintain and support students' privileged self-understandings through all five aspects of elite identification, this chapter will focus on how teachers adopt privileged self-understandings centred around exclusion, engagement, and excellence (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). To adopt a privileged self-understanding means that behaviour is not necessarily driven by fear or external pressures, but rather, exclusionary conceptions are embodied in the educator and expressed in their relations and interactions in the work environment. Teachers adopt privilege, but are also a *source* of privilege themselves, in that they are not merely passive participants subjected to privilege, but they also share and enact these privileged conceptions themselves, ultimately governing teacher-student interactions and teachers' relations with one another. This is the common thread that weaves throughout different examples that my participants shared with me.

First, I will explore how this notion is a central component of how teachers understand their place within their respective work environments and the degree of responsibility they assume in supporting students. As mentioned in Chapter 2, exclusion for students begins with the admission process involved in attending an elite school, whereby, entrance is deemed a sign of success based on intrinsic characteristics (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). This initial process of exclusion is foundational in fostering a sense of identity grounded in intelligence and a strong work ethic (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a, p. 199). Once a student becomes a member of an elite school, this process repeats itself in the form of ranking systems based on success both formally and informally through awards, extracurricular involvement, and how they are perceived. When thinking about this aspect of elite identification in relation to educators, I propose that when a students' success cannot be envisioned either academically or behaviourally,

teachers question the student's place at the school. Teachers show preferential treatment to students who demonstrate excellence in academics, athleticism, or school engagement (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) which ultimately helps to reinforce hierarchical rankings. Secondly, exclusionary experiences come to fruition in elite schools for those who may not already have multiple layers of privilege, as they are simultaneously included and excluded based on identity markers like race, class, and gender (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a, p. 198-9). Specifically, this chapter will also conceptualize how teachers' relations differ based on the intersection of race, class, and linguistic variations, thereby positioning certain students as outsiders to the advantages of the elite community in how teachers choose to enact discipline, advocate for students, or the extent to which they support students' needs in an elite environment.

These findings are brought forth through an analysis of teachers' reflections and commentary on their own work, as well as observations and descriptions of their experiences with other colleagues in their school environment. Both types of testimony will be included, as honouring the whole story of individuals in elite spaces. Excluding teachers' observations would limit our understanding of how privilege governs educators' experiences in elite private schools because what people are attuned to noticing – or not noticing – about privilege is telling. Further, in the context of scholarship on Critical Race Theory (CRT), Lawrence (1995) reminds us that “we must learn to trust our own senses, feelings, and experiences, to give them authority, even (or especially) in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality” (p. 338). This sentiment directly speaks to teachers' testimonies regarding race relations in the work environment that I explore in this chapter, but is also valuable when thinking holistically about elite school culture and the difficulties of “studying up” (Seidman, 2019). For many elite private

school teachers, the tenuous nature of their job leads them to withhold stories (Variyan, 2018) that confront the dominant narrative of prestige, integrity, and excellence that elite schools market or claim to uphold. So, when teachers do share experiences that counter the dominant narrative, it is important to listen to them. Sharing these experiences, or counternarratives (Dixson & Anderson, 2018), is necessary for coming to understand the pervasiveness of exclusionary notions, and elucidates how privilege is woven into the fabric of elite school culture.

### **5.1 Teachers' Beliefs and Practices around Exclusion**

All eight participants of this study illustrated that they adopt privileged self-understandings around the notion of exclusion, excellence, and engagement, which shapes how they conceive of their responsibility to instruct, offer support, or speak about students.

Participants expressed that it is those students who achieve academic excellence, demonstrate athleticism, or have ample involvement in extra-curriculars are considered ideal students, reinforcing the hierarchical structure in their daily decisions and actions as educators.

Specifically, seven of the eight participants describe that poor grades and/or behaviour could constitute grounds for not re-enrolling students, however, one of the eight participants used exclusionary language solely in reference to behavioural issues. This difference arises from the way the school defines their educational focus and programming, thus influencing the teachers' conception of this process and how they understand their role as a teacher.

Christopher<sup>20</sup>, a physical education teacher and coach, uses exclusionary notions to characterize elite private school culture, before going on to discuss the ways he notices some ineffective ways that students are 'supported' in his work environment:

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<sup>20</sup> Black cisgendered male (10 years)

I think all private institutions sell the paper. It's a matter if you can truly back up what you're saying. For instance, I've seen [private schools] advertise that one hundred percent of their graduates go on to post-secondary education and it's not a lie. You know what they don't tell you? The kids that they kicked out before they graduated. Because I know a kid personally who got kicked out of [a private school] and they never graduated, but they paint this picture that once their kid's in, they're going to graduate and go on to pursue their education. But that's not the truth. But they're not lying, though. It's just words, right, just manipulating words and that's all.

Christopher claims that all elite schools attempt to sell a success story about their establishment but points out that this narrative is not always truthful because it is not equally applied to all students. His general observation of the elite private school system is also concretely situated in the smaller context of his work environment. He talks about the disingenuous use of technology to help students who are underachieving and explains that technological platforms used to store and share student work aren't necessarily for the benefit of the students, but rather, serve as a mechanism of teacher self-preservation when students aren't meeting expected results:

But that stuff wasn't used to help the kid. It was used to justify why they failed, why they weren't accomplishing what they were supposed to accomplish. It was paperwork to back up the teacher as opposed to paperwork used to help these kids through a process and a diplomatic way to lay the blame on the kid...So, we weren't trying to put out the fire before it started. We were just trying to say the fire is not my fault because look at this and this.

Christopher explains that documentation and monitoring does not necessarily lead to early intervention nor is it an analytic tool for aiding students experiencing academic difficulty. Instead, it communicates what a teacher may feel is not within their realm of responsibility, which is extending support to those who are too far removed from ideals around success and excellence. Furthermore, on the other end of the spectrum, Christopher identifies favouritism for those who participate in athletics as he reflects on his role in building a competitive sports program. He explains that for both teachers and students involved, they possessed a certain prestige rooted in meritocratic ideals:

I think at times being part of the [sports] program, they felt that it meant something beyond what it was supposed to. Being part of the [sports] program was supposed to be something that you achieved, and you would learn how to navigate life within a safe environment, but you're going to be pushed and tested and I think that created a bit of an aura to it, like it had a certain aura. [Mr. X] had a certain aura, the kids in the program had a certain aura and it almost raised the expectations for everyone around involved in it because we tried to stand for excellence as much as we could. The problem is that the little lessons that those kids would abide by wasn't necessarily transferring outside of the program. And I definitely witnessed that when I had teachers send me emails about a current player and what they were doing or their attitude in class and would have me address it in order to get the kid to perform in their classroom...

His description of the program as an "aura" and a place of "excellence" highlights the attitude he has adopted around the prestige of athletics in the school but also how this perspective extends to the school community. Christopher not only sees the program as being demarcated with special

qualities associated with hard work and excellence, but he too harbours these sentiments. When considering the rankings of the school system, Christopher expresses that being a coach is associated with having more respect or authority than other colleagues. Although Christopher explicitly disagrees with students' behaviour and he intends to help his colleagues without "devaluing the teacher," I propose that his role as coach still means "something beyond what it was supposed to" in the context of the school environment. His self-conception is marked by notions of superiority in how he views the prestige of the program he operates, but there is also an acceptance of his perceived authority in comparison to other colleagues. In another context, Christopher describes how he has taken on the practice of sending messages to classroom teachers in advance of the sporting season so that he can be notified of any misbehaviors or academic underachievement of his players. While this practice can be seen as supportive of student success, it is also indicative of how Christopher's acceptance of his authority shapes his teaching strategies. He does not describe partaking in these practices with students outside of the athletic program he operates.

Jeff<sup>21</sup>, for example, explains that grades are shared on online teaching platforms available to teachers that are regularly reviewed. He claims that there are typically conversations between guidance counsellors and teachers about students' academic success. He explains that low marks are a point of conversation to determine the viability of the student at the school, and that students are often weeded out in earlier years such as grades nine and ten. Similarly to Christopher's observation of online platforms, this system is used as a tool to determine if the student should keep a place in the school. He says, "I think the intention really is, even though it sounds kind of weird to say, as a student, if you're a good fit or not, because it is a smaller

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<sup>21</sup> White cisgendered male; social science and English teacher (21 years)

school, and we don't really have a lot of resources available to us to support students who are struggling or at least we don't put our resources into that." He provides an example of a student he taught that was receiving marks in the 70s. Jeff explains that the student felt "mentally unfit to be a student because of the way the culture works." Although the student was not failing, and actually, was meeting ministry standards, a grade in the 70s does not fit within ideas of academic excellence. In comparison, "low marks" or receiving a grade in the 70s are not determining factors as to whether a student is permitted to attend a publicly funded school. As well, the Ministry of Education guidelines encourages teachers to investigate and understand why students are experiencing difficulty and offers a robust special education program with a variety of avenues for addressing educational challenges (Ministry of Education, 2010; 2013; 2017). However, for Jeff, the viability of the student based on academic performance is an important part of the conversation, demonstrating how exclusionary notions mark how he speaks and views students. Jeff as well as other elite private school teachers, may not be as motivated to challenge this conception because they derive a higher status from teaching in a school that is full of students who excel academically. It enforces conceptions of exclusion and excellence, which is associated with being a teacher of the top tier students who, through hard work, achieve academic success and ultimately earn their place at the school. When asked about teachers' role when it came to reinforcing these high expectations for students, Jeff describes it as part of his job and explains that even conversations he has had that were intended to support and encourage students who have difficulty, often have an adverse effect. He shares that "the stronger message is that you're a failure and there's a problem. [Although not intended], even the very fact that I'm having the conversation with the kid communicates there's a problem." At a later point in the interview, he further describes discrepancies in how students are treated based their ability:

But in terms of what I observe, it's more about students who are very academically able and very independent [that] don't have any trouble from us. But anyone who struggles, either to work independently or whatever. It's not like they have things taken away from them or anything like that, but just the sort of subtle pressure and beyond pressure, it's I don't know. I feel like we look at them and talk about them and treat them differently than we do students who are just highflyers and are able to basically function without teachers. These students, who if they didn't have me as a teacher, they would do the same. They would be absolutely fine. But the ones who actually need us, I feel like...I don't know. I think they get a hard time from us, and it is a hard time.

Although Jeff seems troubled as he admits to the workings of the school culture, he also acknowledges the ways in which they have become ingrained in his personal approach to teaching, as well as others in the school. He communicates that to be a teacher in an elite private school means to favour and focus on those who excel academically, while those in need of support “get a hard time.” However, publicly funded schools certainly allocate resources and funds toward supporting students struggling academically, and place importance on remediating of achievement gaps (Ministry of Education, 2017). This does not mean that elite schools are completely void of supports. However, in this case, Jeff communicates that neither he nor the school, are particularly focused on those who need additional academic remediation and there are clear limits to how far these supports can be offered. Conversations between teachers and administration are more heavily oriented toward students' overall place or “goodness of fit” at the school. These orientations demonstrate that Jeff's identity and daily work are marked by exclusion and excellence in his catering to students who are perceived to be independent and

“academically able.”

Jeff, a debate moderator and coach, also reveals that this “subtle pressure” extends beyond the classroom and trickles into extra-curricular spaces. He explains that teachers’ beliefs and conduct play a pivotal role in communicating the value and importance of school involvement, which consequentially signals who is to be celebrated – those who are hard-working and heavily engaged in the school community:

We want to promote school spirit. We want them to be involved and feel involved. And if you feel involved and connected, that's good. And that's true, I believe. But the other thing is by measuring them, counting them, keeping track of them, reporting on them in that way, now I think you're sending the message that you should be doing more, or you've only been in eight co-curricular things. But what about ten? So, over the year they have been in 15. We never say you should be in as many of these things as possible, but at the same time we're supposed to promote them. We're supposed to keep track of them, write and report on them and all those things. I think to really say to the students that the more you're in, the better.

Teachers’ beliefs in the importance of school involvement, coupled with extensive promotion and monitoring of engagement in extra-curriculars, helps to create rankings within the school, which ultimately sends the message that as a student, the more involved you are, the better you are. Jeff’s self-conception as a teacher comes with strong notions of supporting the rankings associated with school engagement (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a) through his promotion and monitoring of extra-curriculars. It becomes a value system that Jeff shares in that places less emphasis on fostering connection in lieu of judging a student’s merit or worthiness.

Shay<sup>22</sup>, a teacher who has worked both in the publicly funded and private education system, affirms that being a teacher in this elite space is beneficial because of the opportunity to engage with hard-working academic students, on which much of the enjoyment of his work rests:

I was designing my own stuff, you know, [the principal] was super affirming and respectful of my gifts. And he asked me to redesign [two courses]. And so, there was a sense that I really could write my own ticket in a way that doesn't happen in the public school. And that was enjoyable. Because I was teaching [these courses] there's a bit of a different clientele, [students] are willing to roll up their sleeves and kind of read some heavy stuff. Compared to, many of whom are sweet kids, but some of them really are looking for the path of least resistance, and so I got to stiff [another teacher] with that and go do my thing and so that added to the enjoyment of it.

Shay's language is exclusionary and hierarchical in nature, demonstrating that it is a way of thinking that he subscribes to. First, he makes a distinction between publicly funded and private education in terms of the type of courses that can be offered, suggesting that only private schools have room for robust and highly academic pedagogy. Secondly, he highlights the existence of internal rankings and the appeal of working with students of a high ability, as he is able to "stiff" or task another teacher with the challenge of working with students who are less academically inclined. His language points to the continued tiers and rankings of academic ability within an elite institution. It signals that his self-conception as a teacher partly rests on his place within this hierarchical ranking, as his work as an educator is tied to teaching academically successful students and anything less does not seem to be within his purview.

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<sup>22</sup> White cisgendered male (30 years)

Amy<sup>23</sup>, a newer teacher to the elite school system, embodies exclusionary notions when asked about her observations of two students who were asked to not re-enroll the following school year. She finds that in some cases, administration does not act swiftly enough in removing students, showing that she too believes that the removal of students should be part of the regular maintenance of elite culture:

The student was very lovely and trying very hard, but we just don't have the resources to support the student. The second student, it was sort of chronic underachievement, causing poor marks across the board, as well as chronic behavior issues in essentially every class. And it had been multiple years of behaviour issues. In my opinion, this should have been dealt with like a year ago or two years ago. So, the fact that it took this long doesn't fill me with confidence.

Amy demonstrates that it is part of her own rationale and way of thinking to question a student's place at the school. She claims that "we just don't have the resources," to denote where one's time and effort should be allocated for students in elite spaces, and evidently, that is not with those who are underachieving behaviorally or academically. It is often students in need of extra supports or accommodations that teachers feel may not belong at the school, a finding that Megan also illustrates in the following example.

Megan<sup>24</sup>, in describing her school's informal policies, justifies the steps taken that lead to students' eventual exit from the school. She explains that students aren't exited on a whim, but that the decision is made after several attempts have been made to help the student:

**Stephanie:** When you said that kids are monitored within the first couple of years to ensure that they can handle the academic rigor of the school. Have you witnessed

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<sup>23</sup> White cisgendered female; English and civics/career teacher (2 years)

<sup>24</sup> White cisgendered female; English and social science teacher (8 years)

students being exited from the school because their grades perhaps weren't where they should be?

**Megan:** Yes, however, it's usually more than that. What I mean by that is, the student has been struggling academically for a prolonged period of time.

Communication is gone from the school. The school has really tried to offer every kind of support. The family seems on board with it, then doesn't follow through. And then usually by the end of it all, they're in the process of having their child tested. But they're like, 'Okay, so what we need, you guys can't support us, great school.' And then they're gone.

Megan affirms that numerous supports are offered, however, when testing for certain learning challenges, she contradictorily states that the parents leave because the school does not have the resources to support the child's needs. Megan does not question this, but rather, uses it to justify the decision and eventual exit of the student, reinforcing the idea that there are only certain resources for certain types of students. It demonstrates that it is a rationale that she also upholds.

James explains that students at his current school are asked to leave when they do not meet the expectations behaviourally rather than academically due to the available academic supports. Thus, the way he personally adopts exclusionary practices differs from other participants and is something that coincides more closely with the practices of the school.

**James:** But I think kids who are repeat offenders of being disrespectful, of being disruptive are definitely the ones who are considered to be exited. But you're obviously biased when some kid shows up the next year and you're like, I swear that kid was going to be gone?

**Stephanie:** So, it's more of a behavioral thing? They are exited when they are continuously disrespectful or have disruptive behavior?

**James:** Yeah, generally. One of the things I think our admin takes seriously is when kids are rude to staff. I think that's probably the one thing that does not fly. I would say that's probably where a lot of kids are definitely getting exited or are getting those warnings or those really long glances. What's the word? Kind of everyone's looking into it sort of deal.

**Stephanie:** What I'm also hearing is that it's a collaborative approach to the monitoring of students?

**James:** Yeah. Oh yeah. And so, until it gets to the final decision, at the end of the day the Big Boss is making the decision, but it generally is collaborative to a point. We often get like emails from admin that'll say, can you please comment on the student's behavior this year, for example. And then everyone kind of chimes in [...]

James shows the exclusionary ideas that he subscribes to when he admits disappointment and surprise when a student is enrolled in his class after being under the presumption that the student was not to return, signalling that he expects that students who do not fit the ideal should not be part of his classroom. He affirms that monitoring students is a collaboration between teachers and administration, which points to the idea that it is a practice widely adopted and shared by teachers. While James identifies what type of student is excluded, he also speaks to who is at the top of the hierarchical structure. This not only includes students who have achieved academic success, but also athletes at the school. He explains that “they are favorited at the end of the day. We give more leniency. Everyone seems to like them a little bit more. We consider them to be the kids who have great character, which is true and false in some situations.” In using the word

“we,” James suggests that such favouritism is shared between him and his colleagues. He goes on to describe that athletes may get “extra perks in terms of their academics and their accommodations [...]”, which may look like a mark bump or more opportunity and roles in the school community.

Jesse claims that students’ behaviour, rather than academics, secures their place within the school. However, the way they adopt exclusionary notions differs from the practices at their school, and Jesse asserts that academic success is paramount. They explain, for example, that sometimes students enter the school when they are younger based on the family’s reputation or their ability to offer financial contributions. As a result, the school’s admission team might ignore the academic strength of the student, and academic difficulty might present later in their high school years. Although Jesse notes the inequity of the admission process, simultaneously, they also adopt their own form of privileged self-understandings by explaining that certain types of students should not be permitted or retained based on poor academic performance:

Especially when we have conversations around like goodness of fit at the school.

Because we're a highly academic school, it's not a very malleable program. It's like, well, we admitted them so it's our job now to support them through. Should they have been admitted in the first place? No, because it's like how much does accessible funds weigh in the admission process? Because I know background checks are done on families. So, this kid who clearly struggles in school, is all of a sudden in our programming.

Although Jesse speculates on inequities in the admission process, which communicates some of the exclusionary boundaries based on one’s position, the language around academic achievement shapes their understanding of who is worthy to be at the school and the type of student they

should teach, which is those with the ability to obtain academic accolades.

Fiona also observes the way teachers assume this understanding by explaining how favouritism creeps up in teachers' responses when students miss their class. She is a teacher that calls students out of class for extra assistance or support. She explains that there are often grumblings around students missing class time for extra support from the learning resource centre, but students missing class for athletic events does not receive the same backlash.

I think that there's an imbalance, kids being excused from class early to go to athletic events and that sort of thing. And teachers don't seem to bat an eye at that in most cases. But if you have another student who is not in the classroom for a particular reason, if they need to go for extra help or support, teachers get all unhappy about this. 'Oh, well, so-and-so missed the last 15 minutes of class because they were called out and this was important time.' Well, if they were an athlete, the same conversation might not have been had if they missed part of your class. So, I think it's just some little things that seem perfectly normal to many people. But when you step back and look at the optics, that could be an example.

Thus, the small moments of discontent and judgment from teachers are significant in their gesture toward exclusionary ideas and practices toward students based on involvement and ability. Her observation captures a small, yet poignant example of elitism because it is how we spend time, an important resource in and of itself, that we communicate what we value most. In this case, she feels she is often met with resistance when looking for support from her colleagues and does not receive the same respect that athletic coaches do.

### ***5.1.1 Summary***

This section illustrated how teachers adopt aspects of exclusion, excellence, and engagement in how they define their role and conduct their work. The notion of exclusion as adopted by teachers significantly defines the ways in which they extend their expertise, resources, and how they speak about students. Teachers express that they are available for those with strong academic abilities (excellence), rather than those with academic challenges. Jeff, for example, describes that struggling students “get a hard time from us”, while Shay prefers to “stiff another teacher” with the task of working with more academically challenging students. Christopher says he feels that there is a disingenuous use of school platforms for recording student work, which is used as a “diplomatic way to lay blame on the kid,” when the student is too far removed from meeting high academic standards. Teachers also communicate that those beyond this ideal do not necessarily have a place in the school. Students do not fail at the school, rather, they are exited or asked to leave when ideals are not met. Teachers like Amy and Megan express that behavioural reasons or academic difficulties are sound justification for students to not be readmitted to their respective schools. Similarly, Jesse expresses that those with academic challenges should not be admitted to the school in the first place. Engagement also creates rankings at school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a), and James talks about how teachers give athletes preferential treatment through leniency and the allocation of leadership roles. Christopher showcases these same beliefs in his discussion of excellence in the sports program, which he is central to operating, but also through his elevated status as a coach in comparison to his colleagues. While this section demonstrates how teachers adopt exclusionary ideas and practices based on notions of excellence, whether it is academic success or engagement in the

school, the following section will further explore inequity and exclusionary practices from an intersectional perspective, particularly along the lines of race, class, and linguistic differences.

## **5.2 Thinking Further About Who is Excluded: An Intersectional Perspective**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the participants for this study work at ‘demographically elite’ schools, in which there is a large portion of the student population that is academically successful or have acceptances to prestigious universities (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p. 1109). As well, being demographically elite suggests that despite attempts to diversify the student body through recruitment processes, elite schools are still relatively homogenous, especially in terms of racial diversity and socio-economic status (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b, p. 1109). In asking participants of this study about their school communities, the homogenous nature of these schools was affirmed in the make-up of both faculty and students, with slight variances based on geographical location. Although my participants work at schools that are quite homogenous, it does not mean that there aren’t students of different racial, linguistic, and class backgrounds in attendance. This section details teachers’ interactions with those students. Particularly, variances in the extent to which teachers support, speak about, and discipline students of different racial, class, and linguistic backgrounds, become evident. This section demonstrates how exclusion becomes part of teachers’ self-understanding, not only through conceptions of excellence and engagement, but also exclusion based upon students’ identities.

### ***5.2.1 Teachers and English Language Learners***

Exclusionary conceptions not only come to light through praising academic and athletic feats, but also come to fruition for those who do not have multiple layers of privilege. Teachers’ roles and responsibilities are conceived around a tiered structure, whereby whiteness is synonymous with eliteness and always at the top of the hierarchy. Teachers work within invisible

boundaries that direct them to focus their time and energy with those they perceive to be at the top. Agnod and Gaztambide-Fernández (2019) discuss how elite identity is always co-constructed around whiteness:

To become White, then, is to “line up” with the material and symbolic economies of White supremacy, whether to benefit from White supremacy and/or to know oneself as superior and entitled to its resources. These racial economies are linked through the logic of White supremacy and, at the same time, are specific to the expulsion of particular people and leverage different formations of colonialism and settler colonialism depending on the context (for example, racism against Black, South and East Asian, and Indigenous people, as well as Muslims as a racialized population).  
(p. 731)

Thus, the extent to which educators perceive and feel obligated to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) reflect forms of settler colonialism and are therefore hierarchical in nature. Linguistic expressions are often intertwined with racial identities (Kroskrity, 2021), so experiences that other an individual based on linguistic identity markers simultaneously reinforce conceptions of elite status with whiteness. The same support and advocacy are not extended to ELLs as linguistic (and racial) markers position them by removing layers of privilege in these spaces.

It is important to note that elite private schools differ in their programming to assist ELL students; some have designated ELL programs, while some students receive unspecialized support through the learning resource centres or from the classroom teacher. However, it will become clear that the presence of an ELL designated program in comparison to general support does not significantly influence the overall findings of this study: teachers feel entitled to teach

to the elite White student, therefore, the extent to which accommodations are offered becomes limited based on this conception, which in turn adversely affects ELL students and excludes them from receiving the same advantages as their White counterparts. This chapter will first discuss how teachers perceive elite schools as a place of opportunity but will then demonstrate that all participants in this study speak to the limits of how and to whom its resources are given.

It is important to first acknowledge that some teachers feel their school adequately welcomes and celebrates diversity through cultural events. One teacher, Megan<sup>25</sup>, explains how the school celebrates differences to show support and inclusivity:

Through extracurriculars and initiatives, it is being celebrated, and particularly since we have international students, many of them celebrate the lunar new year celebration in which the school is part of and gets to experience and celebrate that. You know, there are different initiatives throughout the school year that celebrate diversity [...]

James<sup>26</sup> expresses similar sentiments about how his school creates an environment of inclusivity:

We just like value every student, no matter who they are and where they're coming from or what their race is and what their sexuality is and what their religion is. And I just think that in all of us that, like our whole model has been to basically celebrate diversity throughout the whole year. Anti-Racism has been brought into all our courses. And it's just something that we are consistently always thinking of.

When I initially asked teachers about the benefits of working in an elite private school, many were able to articulate that there is an abundance of resources to support student needs and school initiatives, as well as small class sizes to allow for personable interactions. For example,

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<sup>25</sup> White cisgendered female; English and social science teacher (8 years)

<sup>26</sup> White cisgendered male; English and geography teacher (6 years)

Amy<sup>27</sup> explains that “the class sizes are small, and that really gives you an opportunity to know each kid on a really personal level that you might not have if you go to class with thirty-two kids.” Megan talks about the multiple avenues where assistance is offered:

Like we spoke about before, there is that network of support. So, when a kid is struggling with something emotional, social, academic, there are people there, including the teachers who look out for that kid and make sure they have the support that they need and try to support them as best they can.

James also applauds some of the strategies used to support students: “I think it's definitely a benefit for the students because we're able to give extra help [...] And I think that is beneficial for a lot of kids because we don't really give a fail option. It's very rare that you're going to fail.” Furthermore, when thinking about the advantages of working in elite school, Jeff acknowledges the following:

I feel like I'm kind of experiencing privilege along with the students, just being in the place that I'm in. We just have a lot of resources at our disposal. We might not have every single thing on our wish list, but close. I think all of us, even students and teachers, feel like if we need something, we just have to ask for it and it will be granted.

Like Jeff, Jesse also finds that the access to resources comes in great abundance. They explain: “But PD opportunities, I don't think I've ever been told no, you can't do this or no, we won't pay for it. I've taken multiple AQs. I've gone to multiple international conferences, and it's paid for. I wouldn't have that opportunity [in the public board.]” However, the broad sweeping statements

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<sup>27</sup> White cisgendered female; English and civics/career teacher (2 years)

of inclusivity and resources are circumstantially true. There certainly are efforts made by teachers that communicate inclusivity and acceptance (also discussed in Chapter 4), as well as efforts made for students to find social, emotional, and academic help. Although some teachers acknowledge the attempts to honour diversity through school initiatives or through selecting diverse curricular materials, this process of inclusion is either superficial or the applicability of resources is limited because it does not extend to other realms of the student's life. Teaching practices and approaches are not always in service of these particular students. The following will show how teachers assume privileged self-understandings around exclusion in their work as educators in relation to ELLs.

### *5.2.2 Examples of Exclusion for English Language Learners*

While some teachers may not be explicitly aware of the superficial ways diversity is presented, Fiona<sup>28</sup> is more critical of its portrayal, especially in terms of marketing and branding for the school. As a teacher who works closely with international students who are ELLs, she explains that even though there are different minority groups of students, these differences are always expressed and ranked in relation to whiteness:

We're slowly becoming more diverse at our school. And maybe part of the image is to try to make it clear that there is diversity. We're trying to make it clear that we're a welcoming community. But I still think even with some of the kids that are visible minorities, I still feel like even some of them are hand-picked in a way that looks very integrated. And I don't know how to say that in a way that's not offensive [...] I think they're hand-picked in a way that kind of is a nod to diversity, but it's not full on. None

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<sup>28</sup> White cisgendered female; English and social science teacher (23 years)

of my international students have been invited to be part of the photo ops in the school yet.

Diversity as a school identity is welcomed, yet when it pertains to being a diverse individual, there are limitations in the extent to which it is honoured, which echoes Gaztambide-Fernández's findings (2009a). Students who are picked for photos are "integrated" while the international students are too distinct to be included in idealized images in school brochures that uphold whiteness as the ideal. I incorporated this excerpt from Fiona's interview because it encapsulates how some of the following exemplars depict ELL students as both insiders and outsiders within the school, in that they attend the school, but are not deemed worthy enough to be featured as a model student. The following will continue to show how this notion is perpetuated in how educators carry themselves in their work environment.

Christopher<sup>29</sup> describes how classroom engagement and management may differ for international students that are English Language Learners. He points to the economic benefit of accepting students, but also the disposition of ambivalence that educators and the school community feel:

The main reason why those kids were there was from an economic perspective. They were paying more money than everyone to be there to help boost the school. That's what it came down to. That's why you bring in foreign students, as callous as that sounds. It has nothing do with trying to make them better and the reason why I can say that is because the international students were literally treated like a separate entity than everyone else. What they were allowed to do or not do was very different than everyone else. They could wear whatever they wanted. They can color their hair

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<sup>29</sup> Black cisgendered male; Physical education teacher (10 years)

however they wanted, [everyone] just kind of just said ‘Okay, well, those are the Chinese students. We just leave them there and that's it.’

Christopher goes on to expound this notion of international students as a “separate entity” by sharing an observation he had when substituting a class for another teacher. The ELL students he speaks of are also international students, as there aren’t any domestic ELL students to his knowledge. He is made aware of the absent teacher’s comportment and expectations of these students through observations and commentary from some students in the classroom:

**Christopher:** The expectations for those kids were very different in the classroom.

Let’s say you have 15 kids, one Asian kid, 14 non-Asian kids. The Asian kid could do anything they want in that classroom. Literally, anything they wanted. I remember subbing in for a class and the Asians there, I think there were three of them at the time. The three of them literally picked their desks up, sat together, and they were playing a game on their computers. I remember walking over. I was like ‘Okay, guys, you guys can't be playing games.’ And one of other the students turned and said to me, ‘Oh, Mr. So-and-So allows them to do that during class.’

**Stephanie:** Why is that the case?

**Christopher:** Because that was the easiest way to deal with them. Like that's their class. Look who am I? I'm literally there to babysit you until that teacher comes back. What am I going to tell you? Okay, that sounds good? So, that was my personal experience. But then I was kind of like, ‘Oh, okay, I don’t know what to do with that.’

Christopher is aware of the lack of engagement with ELL students in the classroom but because of the particulars of this situation, he does not feel like he really has a place to advocate for these students. Even though he is responsible for the classroom at the time the occurrence happened,

he does not consider it is his role to make changes in the space. His actions mirror his descriptions of the school community and the regular classroom teacher, as he also sends the message that “it [is] the easiest way to deal with them”, and his decision not to engage is a sign of his own ambivalence toward these students. When asked further about his own interactions with ELLs, he described limited experiences and interactions based on his focus and speciality in athletics, suggesting that he too is an observer and not someone who regularly engages with this group of students, reinforcing the notion that ELL students are seen as a “separate entity.”

On the other hand, Fiona has experience working directly with international students that are ELLs. She is able to discuss the many supports she engages with, even beyond academia, which includes monitoring student adjustment through focusing on the social and emotional well-being or by simply helping with practical questions about how to navigate Canadian culture. She does express a sense of fulfilment in her daily work with these students. However, despite her personal efforts in facilitating the program, she notices her own discrepancy in how students are treated. During the interview process, she realizes that students in the ELL program are more likely to be exited in comparison to other students at the school, a process she is intimately involved in. She comes to this realization when she is asked about students’ successes and failures in the program.

That's so interesting, I just realized that we let our international students who are in the ESL program, we do let them fail and then we chalk it up to, with lots of paperwork that our program is not what they need at this point and that there are other programs out there for them.

Fiona’s ability to reflect on her experiences led to self-awareness of some of the ways she adopts exclusionary ideas in her own role, despite some of the positive relationships and successes she

has had with students. She describes a lot of the decision-making, documentation, and paperwork that she is primarily responsible for that justify choices to exit students that she had not critically examined before. She goes on to explain that part of the rationale comes with not wanting older students staying in the program beyond the ‘normal’ trajectory of high school students, which is not an option offered at the school. She demonstrably shares and reinforces this rationale in her daily work. Being a school focused on academic excellence, allowing students to stay for an extra year to successfully complete their studies would be perceived as diminishing the reputation of their program. Furthermore, Fiona speaks to some of the deficiencies within the school by talking about how classroom teachers exemplify inconsistent efforts:

Some teachers do not provide the accommodations that they should be providing, and that's always a bit of a challenge. Teachers take it very personally if you raise these questions because they see it as a criticism of their professionalism. So, it's always a very delicate dance and conversation. And it's almost like you have to make it sound like ‘I'm sure you've already thought about this, but could you tell me what the accommodation is?’ So, I have to play to their ego in order to try to make sure [...] I think that might be a policy that isn't always followed by some teachers or just the inconsistency of it.

Fiona not only describes some of the educational gaps, but also speaks to some of the challenges that come with advocating for students. The “delicate dance” she engages in as an attempt to avoid resistance or “inconsistency” in teachers’ efforts further demonstrates that she works with educators who do not consider linguistic support to be their primary responsibility. These forms of self-understandings place invisible boundaries on the means teachers will or will not employ to aid students.

Disparity in treatment is also exemplified when James<sup>30</sup> reflects on two experiences with students around academic integrity and questions of teacher agency. Although the interview questions were focused on understanding the teacher's ability to challenge instances of privilege around grading and assessment, the findings more strongly reveal how James adopts exclusionary ideas elucidated by differences in consequences for each student he discusses. First, he describes a non-ELL student who plagiarized a paper and was allowed to redo the assignment without consequence. After persistent complaints and denial from the parents about the plagiarized work, James consults administration to seek assistance on how to best navigate the situation. James describes that the decision not to penalize the student happened in collaboration with administration because it would ultimately "harm the relationship with me and the student." Subsequently, he explains another situation where he was able to fail an ELL student for an assignment:

But I had a girl at the end of the school year who didn't show up for four weeks, just to my class because she struggles in English. [She] showed up three or four weeks late for an assignment that I was begging and emailing home about it and all that kind of stuff, and she eventually did. It got a forty-six, which I gave her.

When James was asked about how he decided on the consequences between the two, he expresses some uncertainty: "I don't know if it's choosing the battles at the right time. It's hard to say." Failing the student did not set off any alarm bells with administration or parents, nor were students offered higher grades or the chance to redo the assignment. Although both students did not meet expectations, James recognizes the difference in consequences, but is unable to identify that the inequitable forms of discipline are partly shaped by students' identities and the

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<sup>30</sup> White cisgendered male; English and geography teachers (6 years)

social rankings within the school. As mentioned in the previous section, James expresses that “we don't really give a fail option. It's very rare that you're going to fail,” however, this rare exception seemingly applies to ELL students. This difference in consequence shows how James makes decisions based on an internalized ranking system of the school, where those who do not have multiple layers of privilege are not afforded the same advantages.

Jesse<sup>31</sup> shares that international students are accepted to the school, with a mix of those proficient in English and some who would be considered English Language Learners. They describe some ways they might support students in their classroom who are at the early stages of new language acquisition, particularly through universal design for learning (UDL). Despite personal efforts to think about the needs of these students, they too subscribe to the idea that the school does not have the resources to support this type of learning:

When I'm teaching and I feel like it's a challenging word or a new word, I try to provide simpler synonyms or explain the word again...For everyone, because it's not just an ELL thing. It's also just like supportive of all students. It's that idea around Universal Design for Learning where what's necessary for some is going to be beneficial for all. [...] And it's challenging because we want to support those students, but I don't think our program is in a place where we can support those students. They need basically like a study block with like a teacher or a special ed teacher or an ELL teacher in place during that time where that teacher can support one on one, one to small group [...] I can answer a couple of questions for each, but it's not like I can really help them to understand.

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<sup>31</sup> White non-binary; Math and science teacher (4 years)

Although Jesse is aware of various students' needs, the supports that they think of are not specifically curtailed to this particular group of students, and the school does not show a focused responsibility to support ELLs. Jesse maintains that their school is “not a place where we can support those students” and believes that “it’s not like I can really help them understand.” They also describe other unique instances when they collaborated with the learning resource teachers to help students succeed on an assignment, but overall, they maintain that the scope of learning required is outside the school’s capacity, and therefore, outside of their own capacity or responsibility as well.

In an early interview, Jeff describes how he has some experience teaching English as second language, however, in the context of an elite private school, he does not consider himself to be responsible for offering additional supports:

**Stephanie:** How are English Language Learners supported in the school?

**Jeff:** Here, not really, like I can't really talk about that much. That's something that does not come up either. Those students, I think, are just expected to get support on their own, and based on what I've seen, they are getting that support on their own, like their families are getting that support for them. [ ... ] As far as I know, it hasn't really ever been addressed in terms of academics or social adjustment or anything like that [ ... ]

Jeff expresses that the needs of ELLs are something that he “can’t really talk about much,” signalling that he does not conceive of it as a responsibility in his day-to-day practice as an educator. He explains that he is unsure if students are successful because they are weeded out before entering the school but affirms that various types of supports are not explicitly addressed

by teachers or administration. Offering additional support is not perceived to be part of his role as an educator, but rather, families are expected to find support for their children elsewhere.

Amy observes that teachers do not consistently support ELL students through teaching strategies or educational accommodations. She explains that the burden of this work is primarily placed on teachers who are specifically hired to support these students:

I do feel that English Language Learners are well supported for the most part. We do have specific teachers who can either pull students from the classroom when needed or run specific ESL classes. It's sort of a hybrid model, which I think is really effective. I just think there's not a ton of oversight except from the ESL teacher, the ESL teachers are the ones who are overseeing this. And that's a lot of work. It's a lot of work to manage every single kid in the building, and to sort of liaise with their teachers to make sure their teachers are giving appropriate accommodations. So that's a lot to expect from [a few teachers]. So, I do think that some people probably take the task of supporting students a bit more seriously than others.

Although Amy claims that ELL students are well-supported, there is a sense that this responsibility does not extend to the entire school community. Thus, classroom teachers somewhat separate themselves from the responsibility to engage with tools and strategies in service of these students. Amy describes that it is “a lot work” for ELL teachers but also does not share the workload in her own space since the primary responsibility is placed on others.

Furthermore, the burdensome language that Amy uses when it comes to accommodating these students is also used by Shay. He describes ELL students’ experiences as being part of a system with structural deficiency:

There was no official ESL presence. They kind of just dumped the label on the [learning resource program] and at no time when I was working there, did anybody have part one of ESL. In that school, it was next to useless the amount of support. There was lot of imposition and downloading to teachers, especially the English teachers. This is your problem. [Teachers had a heavy course load]. It's easy to say 'Oh those teachers', but unless there are systemic supports, there is a dimension of systematic racism. Systemic racism isn't the way they persecute other people, it is the way the system is indifferent to the needs of certain communities. It's interesting because this is a [diverse province]. It's not like you need to get a memo to know you are going to get those types of students. The kids are expected to figure it out on their own in that school.

Although Shay explains that the blame is not solely placed on teachers, the language around supporting ELLs describes them as difficult in how they're treated by both administration and teachers. Having the opportunity to teach English, he is also expressing feelings as someone who has worked in a position that has been "dumped on" because he has had to teach "those types of students." Although Shay is correct in identifying that systemic supports are needed, a system operates and becomes a well-oiled machine if all its parts are in agreement. Thus, while his observation for systematic change is certainly salient, the system also includes his and other teachers' adoption of this conception their practices.

### ***5.2.3 Summary***

This section focused on the ways in which exclusion is assumed by educators in their perceptions and treatment of ELL students, illustrated by their rhetoric around not having the resources to support students in their English language learning. It is evident that teachers

assume this understanding in their professional practices or treatment of these students, often positioning them as outsiders. In the examples discussed, teachers were able to identify how inequity exists for ELLs in their schools broadly speaking, yet their own language and perceptions reveal how they have adopted this conception themselves. Some expressed that educating ELL students is a burdensome task, or perceive ELL students as separate entities from the school, and therefore outside their realm of responsibility. Recall that for Shay, there was a lot of “impositions and downloading” onto English teachers in terms of supporting ELLs and for Christopher, an attitude of ambivalence is the “best way to deal with them.” Themes of exclusion also took expression in academic failures, the lack of consistent efforts to offer learning accommodations, or ELL students’ eventual removal from the school. Although Jeff has experience working with ELLs, he does not believe he should be expected to. For Fiona, she becomes aware of how she plays a large role in exiting ELL students from the school when they do not meet academic standards. However, the institutional position is one of abundance; despite teachers describing the ease of access to resources like funding for professional development, it becomes clear that it is not that teachers don’t have opportunities to further support students, it’s that they choose not to allocate their attention or resources in that direction.

#### ***5.2.4 Exclusion According to Race and Class***

Similarly to the findings explored above, teachers adopt exclusionary practices based on race and class. These aspects come to light in everyday discourse, which simultaneously positions students as both insiders and outsiders in elite spaces. Four out of my eight participants demonstrate ways in which teachers subscribe to racist stereotypes and inequitable forms of discipline, which often emerge during moments of contention. This aligns with Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2009a), who expresses that under the aspect of exclusion, “if there is a ‘cultural

problem’, it is the racist cultural dynamics of the elite space they enter that limit [Black students’] possible identification and position” (pp. 198-199). However, the remainder of the participants in my study were not able to clearly identify discrepancies in how students are treated based on these identity markers, which speaks to the nature of inequity, as blindness to social positioning is often a prominent factor in contributing to inequity.

James<sup>32</sup> describes a small altercation between two students in his classroom; after an exchange of words, one Black student knocked a pencil case off another student’s desk, causing a disruption in the classroom. James’ response to the disruption was to tell students that this is only something that happens in a “ghetto” classroom. He explains that the student who knocked the pencil case called him out for his language use, responding with: “you’re only saying that because I’m Black.” In his telling of the story, James offers what he believes is a justification for the remark. He explains that growing up, he would use the word “ghetto” to mean “poor” or “sketchy,” and did not think about possible racial implications. In his initial description of the event, he seems to understand the student’s perspective and seems remorseful. He describes this situation as an opportunity for learning as he felt that he failed in this moment as a teacher. However, when asked for clarification about the incident in a later interview, he contracted his earlier sentiments:

It was more of these kids who are adverse to learning who were like, ‘Yeah, you’re racist sir, you’re racist’, right? And just like trying to control the classroom, or take hold of their classroom, probably what they’re used to doing in public schools.

Sending her to the office in that situation would have just been another load on my desk at the end of the day in terms of what I would have had to have dealt with. So,

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<sup>32</sup> White cisgendered male; English and geography teacher (6 years)

honestly, the reason she said that was because she was on the basketball team, she was going to get in trouble, right? And why not challenge it so that I don't get in trouble. And that's another thing that you don't really have is kids challenging you in that degree or to that extent because you go to the office when you've done something wrong. But to challenge a teacher in that situation is such a...you know what I mean? Only certain kind of kids are going to do that, and I haven't really taught those types of kids.

Furthermore, he makes assumptions about race and class, as the initial term 'ghetto' seems to be replaced with the more politically correct term of 'public school,' yet both terms denote students who are not or should not be part of an elite environment. This finding is similar to Jenkins' (2011), who found that Black students at elite schools in the United States "are accessing high quality, college preparatory curricula and instruction, [but] they are also confronted with color-blind racism in the form of assumptions and stereotypes about Blacks, particularly around academic achievement and inherent intellectual capacity" (p. xv). Although the students in James' classroom are there to benefit from the competitive basketball program, they are subjected to racism in how James thinks about their ability to learn and their place in the school.

Similarly, Amy<sup>33</sup> recalls an experience with a colleague who expressed racist assumptions about a student's identity. She explains that this colleague believed stereotypes around class and race, leading them to make assumptions about a student's upbringing and familial situation:

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<sup>33</sup> White cisgendered female; English and civics/career teacher (2 years)

And I was speaking with a colleague about emailing the students' parents because the student failed a test. And in speaking with my colleague about how to write the email, and the colleague was like, 'Well, you're writing to mom, right?' And I said 'Oh, I don't know. I think I'm going to put both parents on copy'. And my colleague said, 'I don't think Dad's in the picture' and to my knowledge, my colleague never taught the student, just sort of knew the student in passing. There was a dad listed under the kids' parents on the index where I could get that information. I always thought it was very curious that my colleague just assumed that the dad wasn't in the picture because this kid happened to be Black. I don't think that was a coincidence.

In her retelling of the event, Amy identifies racist assumptions that her colleague holds. Both examples illustrate teachers' exclusionary language, stereotypes, and racist ideologies, however, these forms of discrimination are further elucidated in how discipline is approached with students who attend on a bursary or scholarship. In these circumstances, exclusionary practices are poignant because a distinct decision is made about who is included in the school and who is not. Therefore, it is not only language that positions Black students as outsiders, but there is also a physical removal of the student from the elite space.

For example, Shay<sup>34</sup> describes an instance where an exam was taken from inside his classroom desk while he was away. After the exam went missing, it was circulated amongst the entire grade. The two students involved were eventually caught: one White student who paid full tuition and one Black student who attended on an athletic scholarship. Shay describes the ways

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<sup>34</sup> White cisgendered male; English and social science teacher (30 years)

in which the situation unfolded and how discipline was handled differently according to the students' identities:

The one kid who paid the full ticket, he was suspended. And that was just his consequence. And the bursary kid, he was this amazingly gifted athlete who was an incredibly sweet kid, salt of the earth. The other kid was kind of a snickering, privileged kid. But the salt of the earth kid who did this stupid thing partly again, because of the immaturity and trying to fit in with this culture that he's never belonged to before. And our response was to suspend him and to pull his bursary. It's one of the only times I've ever raised my voice to [the principal]. And so, the consequence was that he couldn't come back to his grade 12 year. I had coaches that were coming to me because I was involved. It was my exam. So, the [other teachers and the coach] blamed me. You took away my [athlete], right? And so [some teachers] came yelling at me like there was an injustice. But it was also clear that their real concern was that it was one of their athletes who helps their own identity, by reinforcing their privilege by winning championships. So, it was bizarre that somehow when they were reading the riot act to the second kid, they said to him, you know, now [your teacher] has to write a whole new exam. So, the first kid from intergenerational wealth, I never heard from this kid. That night the bursary kid sent me a rambling email. Not at anybody's behest, on his own steam apologizing to me for what he had done. The kid did not have his bursary restored, and so the kid then went to another school.

Shay says that the bursary student's actions were due to immaturity and to "fit in with a culture he has never belonged to before." This culture that Shay alludes to is one that emphasizes academic ease – the ability to manipulate your way through difficult situations with the appearance of minimal effort (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011), or resisting authority with minimal reprimand (Fitzgerald, 1994). However, it is the White student from an upper-class background that is given an opportunity for elite identity to be enacted, while unequal forms of discipline are applied to the Black student attending on an athletic scholarship. Not enforcing greater discipline for the White students perpetuates the notion of exclusion, and sends a strong message about who is permitted to stay in an elite school and who is exited. This instance shares similarities with Taylor's (2021) research findings, who investigates an elite, private boys school in England. Taylor (2021) finds that students' ability to express ease or navigate the system is racially coded and "in consequence, it will always be harder for those students who are not multiply advantaged to benefit from the specific 'field of production' (Bourdieu, 1993)" (p. 945). While Shay unsuccessfully advocates for the student himself, there is no collective advocacy. The coaches are concerned about losing a star athlete because it is detrimental to their own privilege, rather than advocating for equity in disciplinary practices. In his work with teachers in elite private schools in Australia, Variyan (2018) also discusses how sport is a means to elevate status within the school, especially for male educators. The teachers' reactions in this situation reflect a desire to maintain their own sense of privilege via sports, rather than concern for the student's well-being. Upon further reflection in a subsequent interview, Shay expresses that whenever there are disciplinary measures or moments of contention, "the kids who are on bursary are subtly reminded that they are not quite there yet and that they haven't earned it just yet. I'm ashamed to say that my teaching colleagues have stigmatized kids who are on bursary." I then asked Shay

how they were able to identify which students are on bursary. He replies sarcastically: “they racially profile[d] students. And that’s even better.” However, Shay too holds some of the stereotypes of Black students in elite schools. At one point in his discussion of the incident, he labels the Black student’s apology message as a “rambling, illiterate email”, which contains negative connotations around the student’s intelligence, paralleling some of the stereotypes around ability and intelligence that Jenkins’ (2011) study discusses regarding Black students in American elite schools. Thus, this scenario exemplifies the racist discourse assumed by educators that position Black students as outsiders when idealized roles and conceptions are perceived as not being met.

Christopher, a Black teacher and coach, also describes a situation where a student attended the school on an athletic scholarship. The student found difficulty acclimatizing to the new environment and was put on academic probation. He describes that after being put on probation, the student got into an altercation while defending a friend. Christopher explains the differences in how discipline was approached in this situation:

This kid was basically trying to survive in a private school. And he was literally taken [from a difficult neighbourhood]. That's where he grew up. I grew up in one building on this side, he grew up in the building on the other side. That's how parallel our lives were when it came to opening with sports. And he was traveling two and a half hours a day to get to [school]. No one was trying to help that. No one was trying to understand that, even the [coach who brought him here]. You bring this kid from this situation? You just drop him in the ocean and you're like, swim and that's it. And you better do good on the football field and in the classroom.

Really? Then he got exited from the school because they basically were like, ‘Oh, if you do one more thing.’ And what happened was that his idiot friend, they were in the hallway. And obviously, the kids that are going to gravitate towards him are the ones who really think they're privileged and now they have the backing of this Black kid on their side. His friend starts talking shit to this other kid and they get into it. Then his survival mode kicks in, and he jumps into the fight to defend this friend. It's clear, like I even saw the video, right? The school turned around and said that they ganged up on this kid and beat him up. They kicked the Black kid out and the other kid stayed at the school because of his [academic] "record.” Because no teacher stood up for him. No coach. The coaches were just kind of like [pauses and shrugs shoulders]. He ended up at [another school], that's like the worst school you can go to. Now, he's really set up for failure. They just left him there.

Christopher identifies that the student was placed in an environment that he found difficulty navigating. In this situation, Christopher recognizes that the student didn't have the ability to navigate the new school environment upon entrance, which eventually impacted the student's academic success. However, Christopher also discusses the lack of support from educators and coaches to assist the student, even prior to the physical altercation in the hallway. Due to his academic “record” and involvement in the incident, he is exited from the school, while the other student stayed. However, there is no advocacy for the student from coaches or teachers, echoing Angod and Gaztambide-Fernández's (2019) findings that “elite schools remain deeply rooted in racist logics, and that students of color [...] are expected to satisfy particular roles as students” (p. 724). Thus, because certain roles and ideals are not met, the student is made an outsider by teachers and the school, and ultimately, administrators decide to exit him. This testimony

demonstrates that there are limits to how educators perceive their role to offer support, as those students who do not meet the ideals are not within their realm of responsibility. However, the White student's place in the school is never questioned. Although administration have the final decision, in some ways, this decision was made by educators prior to the altercation by ignoring the Black student's needs. This decision was also made when his coaches didn't offer support as he adjusted to the new school environment, thus demonstrating teachers' privileged self-understandings along the lines of exclusion. Further, Christopher himself expresses exclusionary ideas based on class, as going to a school outside of the elite environment means the student is automatically "set up for failure."

Similarly, Christopher shares another example of a student on bursary who attended the school and felt that teachers did not support his academic success early on. He describes how the student was brought in for athletics, but the same academic care was not extended to that student in ways that he had seen other students receive support:

Could we have done more? Yes, because I think we could have attacked the situation earlier. So, when the kids are struggling, let's do something in September, October, instead of waiting until March, because basically we use them for what we wanted, which was basketball, and then 'Oh, well, you were not doing your side of the bargain. So, you're shit out of luck.' I think that's where the problem was. When we could have really tackled the issue, we didn't tackle the issue because the sport at that point became more important. And not even the sport for the kid, for the team and the school, the reputation of the sport superseded his personal achievement in the classroom.

Christopher points out that the prestige of the game became more important than the well-being of the student. The stories that teachers shared in Chapter 4 highlights that teachers feel closely monitored and pre-emptively employ strategies to ensure students continue to earn high grades. Yet, this does not seem to apply to the student on bursary, and therefore demonstrates the exclusionary nature of the school and the internal ranking systems that educators adopt in these environments. Exclusion shapes to whom and how they offer help and what roles students are expected to play. When excellence is not maintained or when the ideal vision of the student is not being upheld, the student is asked to leave the school.

Lastly, Christopher describes the poor treatment of a Black female student because of social, emotional, and familial issues that led to some mental health concerns. As a result, the student was struggling academically and shared some of her struggles with other classmates. Christopher describes that when she shared her concerns, she was advised by teachers and guidance counsellors to refrain from widely sharing such information. The student is eventually exited from the school because she cannot keep up academically. Christopher shares his thoughts on how he feels the situation was addressed:

Her telling people is becoming a problem for the school's image, and that's what they think is wrong? This was the first time I thought something was happening because this girl's Black, because if this girl was one of their prized White students, it would not be going down like that. That much I know... if it was any other White student that was paying tuition to go there, there's no way it would go down like that. And I don't even like to play the race card, but it would be completely just ignorant of me to think that did not play into it.

Christopher explains that this student was not cared for in the same way that he knows a White student who pays tuition would have been. He expresses that teachers' perceptions about her identity as a Black female student influenced how she was treated, and that she was told to silence her difficulties because they deviate from conceptions of the ideal student who stands for excellence or engagement in the school. Therefore, her position became tenuous, and she was eventually asked to leave.

While these examples are brought forward by half of the teachers in my study due to their proximity to the event, when I asked the other teachers about the experiences of these students, many found it difficult to recognize inequity in the school environment based on race, class, or a combination of both. These teachers explained that because the school keeps bursary information confidential to protect students' and families' privacy, they felt unable to speak to inequities in their classroom spaces. Similarly, some teachers were unable to address racial inequities because they felt they were not equipped to discuss them, or they were only able to discuss them in generalities. The inability to notice or discuss inequities speaks to the lack of support or awareness held by educators, signalling exclusionary ideas adopted by teachers that are part of everyday practices and experiences.

Jesse, a White non-binary teacher, hypothetically anticipates the many ways students may be disadvantaged based on economic disparity. However, when it comes to concretely identifying supports that students need, their knowledge is limited:

Well, that's one of the big issues for us right now. They don't tell us who's on [bursaries] and who's not. So, we really don't know who is. We can't support them in their fullest. To me, I think it would only enrich my understanding of the kid and their experience within the school. And then I can provide them better assistance and be

more conscious of the way I'm interacting with them. But right now, I can't say yes or no because I have no clue. Everything is based on assumptions I'm making right now. Furthermore, when thinking about race, Jesse can describe cultural scripts that students feel compelled to live by: "But I think that students sometimes feel like they have to fit into a certain mould or a certain stereotype. If you're Asian, you can't be athletic. You have to be intelligent. If you're Black, you can't be intelligent, you have to be athletic. But if you're White, you can do it all." Although some of the stereotypes coincide with the other examples that my participants shared, they are not able to concretely discuss teachers' experiences with racialized students nor their own.

Jeff, a White social science teacher, also shares this sentiment when asked to think about inequity based on race:

[...] I don't really see it with race either, even though there is a really small minority of Black students in the school. I don't really see it with race. But that's maybe because I'm not looking carefully or I don't know, I'm not catching the signals because of my own White privilege. I might hear something, and it won't register with me just because I'm not attuned to the language as much, or it's things that are happening outside of what I see, outside of what I hear, which I think is often the case.

Jeff suspects that inequity is often "happening outside of what [he] sees." However, he is unable to recognize that his very own observation that "there is a really small minority of Black students" is one of the ways in which systemic racism presents itself in his school. Jeff's lack of awareness and the inability to identify inequity demonstrates that he assumes a privileged self-understanding around exclusionary notions according to race. Jeff expresses that his inability to

see or notice is not just something that applies to him personally, but that these conversations do not typically happen amongst other staff:

We do have discussions about privilege in general, but not that extremely important piece of how we support students who are coming into this environment where either by race or socioeconomic status are going to feel probably not fully included. We don't have those discussions actually at all.

Therefore, he shows that deconstructing exclusionary boundaries is not a practice assumed by himself and other colleagues, nor is it priority for the school as a whole. From their perspective, privilege can be discussed without the inclusion of race, which is another marker of blindness to their own dispositions or privileged self-conceptions. However, scholars like Angod and Gaztambide-Fernández (2019) posit that eliteness and whiteness are co-constitutive, as the perpetuation of white supremacist logics is foundational to the purpose of elite institutions. The exclusion of race from these discussions or the inability to see racial inequity speaks to the ways in which white supremacist logics are visible in Jeff's reflection on his work environment. Furthermore, Megan does not see the difficulties that students experience, and believes that their needs are taken care of through bursaries. She only acknowledges the financial sacrifice that the school makes and the benefits that students receive, such as "culture", "learning" and "relationships". In doing so, her attitude suggests a hierarchical structure, in that students attending on bursary are being offered a rich experience, but she does not recognize students' gifts or how they contribute to the fabric of the school:

Truthfully, I know that we have students that are getting financial assistance, but I wouldn't be able to tell you who they are. It is very clear that the families do what they need to do, and if they need assistance, it's taken care of. The school helps them out and

their privacy is respected. I have no idea because I know that there are students that are getting assistance, but it is more important to the school that they are there and experiencing the culture and the learning and the relationships that are happening at the school. And they're willing to take a hit financially in order to have these students as part of our community. But unless it's a need to know, teachers, even students are not aware of the socio-economic assistance. So, I'd say it's very private and equitable in that sense.

Although Megan believes that ignorance is in service of equity, I suggest that not thinking about disparities is what permits inequitable experiences to persist and allows for implicit forms of racism that situate students as outsiders. Lastly, Amy also recognizes that inequitable treatment exists conceptually, but seems resigned in how much she can push the boundaries:

But I also know that different experiences come with having such a discrepancy in class. You know what I mean? Or I'm a gay student and I don't see myself represented anywhere in administration. I'm a Black student, I can name one Black teacher. There's one Black teacher[...] So, obviously a lot of things are not necessarily in your control. So, I'm saying it's difficult to sometimes make the classroom equitable, when there might be constraints [...] What can't I say? I believe in equity. How far can I push the boundary? It's hard at the end of the day.

Amy points to some of the structural limitations that she feels that she must subscribe to and holds the belief that it is difficult to make the classroom equitable based on her own whiteness or other circumstances beyond her control. The structural limitations and constraints beyond Amy's control are the historical and current processes that exclude and/or limit racial diversity in elite spaces, especially through hiring practices and admission processes. While the lack of

representation of Black individuals that Amy speaks of is important to consider, it is also prudent to think about how notions of White superiority (Angod and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2019) held by educators themselves continues to position Black students as outsiders; the Black students described earlier in this chapter were unsupported or unfairly disciplined by educators when they did not meet idealized conceptions of student excellence.

### **5.2.5 Summary**

This section focused on how concepts of exclusion and excellence held by teachers shapes the experience of Black students. It is evident that teachers adopt attitudes, dispositions, and practices that position Black students as outsiders along the lines of both race and class. The testimonies in this section include teachers' beliefs and how they witness these orientations in other colleagues and encounters in the school system. As previously mentioned, for many elite private school teachers, the tenuous nature of their job leads to them withholding stories (Variyan, 2018) that challenge these institutions as places of excellence, which makes it even more important to listen to stories that bring inequity to light. Christopher, a Black teacher, is attuned to noticing educators' lack of advocacy or support when it comes to several Black students who faced academic difficulty. Shay, a White teacher and coach, shares the story of a Black bursary student kicked out of the school, while a White classmate equally involved in the same incident did not receive the same consequence, and describes the lack of support or genuine advocacy from colleagues following the incident. These types of stories should not be ignored, as they bear testimony to how certain actions and dispositions educators hold come to influence and contribute to systematic inequity.

Furthermore, exclusionary attitudes, practices, and dispositions emerge in my participants' beliefs. When conflict occurs, teachers' racist assumptions and stereotypes present

themselves vividly and they subsequently engage in unfair forms of discipline, ultimately exemplifying that within an elite environment, Black students do not benefit from the system in the same way, as their status is under negotiation and contestation. For example, James labels Black pupils as a “certain kind” of student or as “adverse to learning” upon describing an altercation in his classroom, which illustrates that conceptions of excellence are often divided along racial lines. Furthermore, there is also a theme of ‘not knowing’ when it comes to identifying inequities that may exist, which further speaks to educators’ lack of awareness, and signposts teachers’ ideas that eliteness and Whiteness are intertwined. Teachers like Jeff “don’t really see it”, and neither Jesse nor Megan are able to concretely describe the ways in which students may be affected by the elite school context. The subsequent chapter will continue to explore the pervasiveness of teachers’ privileged self-understandings, showing that when these exclusionary notions become part of the self, it not only affects interactions with students, but also impacts relations with colleagues.

## Chapter 6: The Privileged Teacher Part Two

In this chapter, I continue to look at how teachers adopt privileged-self understandings through interactions with their colleagues. Again, to adopt a privileged self-understanding means that fear or external pressures do not necessarily drive behaviours, but rather the educator embodies exclusionary conceptions, expressed in their relations and interactions at work. These expressions are not simply re-enactments of societal privilege. The repetition of expressed actions and thoughts also illustrate something about one's self-understanding. Broader school structures and discourse certainly influence individuals, but broader ideals are also taken on by individuals on a micro level in how they operate and perceive their experiences. In alignment with this perspective, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) offers five categories for thinking about the process of elite identity formation, which he calls the *Five Es* of elite schooling. He says that the Five Es of elite identity stem from external mechanisms in the form of discourse and ideology, and are simultaneously created through individuals' outward expressions of these internalized conceptions (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Through this framework, I focus specifically on how teachers observe and express exclusion in the daily happenings of their workday in dialogue with broader school discourse in this chapter.

Recall, that for students, exclusion begins with the admission process involved in attending an elite school, whereby, entrance is deemed a sign of success based on intrinsic characteristics (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). This initial process of inclusion and exclusion is foundational in fostering a sense of identity around being smart and hardworking student (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a, p. 199). Once a member of an elite school, repetitions of this process continue in the form of ranking systems, both formally and informally, through awards, extracurricular involvement, and perception based on identity markers and student interests. One

poignant example Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) uses to illustrate the internal rankings of the school are students' self-selected seating in the school chapel or cafeteria. In both spaces, Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) observes students move to their seats with great ease, as if these seats belong to them, thereby illustrating the shared understanding of social boundaries and hierarchies based on various intersections of one's identity. There are, for example, demarcated spaces for the "urban students of colour" or theatre kids (also referred to as "the weird kids" or the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) students). The seating dynamics becomes a visible symbol of how social boundaries and hierarchical rankings shape how students relate to one another. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009a) explains that the differing and intersecting dynamics of race, class, and gender illustrate how students construct individual identity despite a shared sense of belonging to the school based on meritocratic ideals.

When thinking about the aspect of exclusion in relation to teachers, this study's findings illustrate that exclusion follows a similar pattern. Like some of the existing literature that shows teachers have positive feelings toward being an elite teacher (Kenway, 2018; Khan, 2011), teachers in this study feel demarcated as a teacher in an elite school. They express that they feel set apart from publicly funded educators. Recall in Chapter 5, Christopher talks about a student who is removed from an elite private school and must now attend a public school. Christopher felt that the student was "really set up for failure" due to this switch, signaling the superiority he feels about the type of program elite teachers and institutions offer. Shay distinguishes himself from public school teachers, as being an elite teacher allows him to offer an academically challenging program and showcase his gifts, which he believes he could not do in the public system. In James' retelling of a conflict with a Black student, he expresses that teachers should not have to tolerate certain disruptions that would typically happen in public schools,

exemplifying the sense of superiority he feels working as an elite teacher. Jeff distinguishes himself as being part of a school with abundant resources as a way that he “experiences privilege along with the kids.” Fiona recognizes there aren’t any “side issues with poverty” or “even attendance” in comparison to publicly funded schools and therefore, it “makes it a little bit easier to be a teacher.” Jesse talks about the abundance of PD opportunities that affords them opportunities they would not have elsewhere, signalling that he believes his workplace is a unique place to thrive professionally. Jesse feels that working as an elite teacher is a position they have come to “earn” and they assert that elite schools are “not for everyone.” Therefore, there is a shared sense of distinction that comes with working in these schools as a private school educator.

Like Gaztambide-Fernández’s framework, the exclusionary attitudes that mark educators’ places at school continue once inside the institution. Although there is a shared sense of superiority that comes with being in an elite institution, further rankings come to light through different identity markers that influence how teachers carry out their work. However, it is not the social boundaries depicted through cafeteria seating that communicates these relations best, but the context and particularities of teachers’ work. Teachers express forms of privileged self-understandings through exclusion in their perceptions, beliefs, and actions, and it also in how my participants describe being positioned by their colleagues’ self-understandings. In this chapter, I examine how race, gender, and sexual identity continue to mark teachers’ experiences in complex ways.

Particularly, teachers’ exclusionary attitudes along the lines of race shape relations between staff in the school through racist discourse. Educators justify their inability to see inequity due to a minority presence of Black educators. An attitude of omission, which teachers

share with the broader school structure, becomes telling of the self-understandings teachers possess and how they feel responsible to carry themselves in the workspace. Conceptions of excellence around their work and place at the school are not equally extended to Black teachers, which takes shape through stereotypes about ability and through unfair forms of surveillance and disciplinary measures.

In this section, I examine how teachers adopt exclusionary practices around gender and sexuality that reinforce traditional expressions of patriarchy, gendered stereotypes, and heteronormativity. Male teachers have a greater sense of agency and express feelings of superiority in comparison to their female counterparts. These exclusionary practices also come to light through the degree of visibility permitted for queer teachers. The findings exemplify that teachers' perspectives on homophobia, transphobia, or biphobia are influenced by whether they teach in a faith-based school. Schools without a strong religious affiliation exemplify inequitable treatment, but there appears to be more dialogue or a shifting perspective, whereas queer identity in faith-based schools is often not visible and silenced through hostile treatment.

### **6.1 The Treatment and Experiences of Black Teachers**

When teachers take on privileged self-conceptions, it becomes part of their way of being and is not limited to their experiences with students. Since such privilege comes to bear on their self-understandings, it also shapes their interactions with colleagues. Teachers adopt exclusionary practices based on race in their interactions with other educators; these aspects come to light in racist discourse expressed by White educators, which simultaneously positions Black teachers as both insiders and outsiders in their work environment. Particularly, teachers recognize that elite institutions are exclusionary in their hiring practices, however, White educators use the underrepresentation of Black teachers to explain or justify an inability to see

forms of inequitable treatment.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, broader discourse comes to bear on teachers' self-understandings, fostering beliefs and ideas that are rooted in the exclusion of certain groups. Moreover, some participants were able to speak to the ways in which a culture of exclusion can serve as a space where racist stereotypes, ideologies, and inequitable forms of discipline affect teachers based on their racial identity. The following will speak to both of these findings.

Jesse<sup>36</sup> describes exclusionary practices that begin upon entrance to the school. They explain that due to small numbers of Black teachers who work in the school, they feel that they cannot speak to inequity within the daily workings of the school:

**Stephanie:** Can you also tell me about a time where you might have seen a staff member receive unfair treatment or disadvantage based on race?

**Jesse:** They weren't hired. Do I have an example? No, because I don't think we really hired people of colour until like a couple of years ago, like we have faculty of colour. But like, I could name them on a hand. Do you know what I mean?

Jesse considers the dearth of Black teachers to be a sign of unfair treatment, but also uses this underrepresentation to rationalize their inability to explicitly see disadvantage. Jeff's response is similar to Jesse's, who explains that their school's staff is predominantly White with few Black teachers working in the school. Thus, he too feels unable to speak to the inequity that may exist based on identity due to the lack of representation of racialized teachers, as well as his position as a White male. While both teachers use this reality to explain why they cannot elaborate on racism at school, it does not mean that microaggressions or racism does not exist in their workplace (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Therefore, exclusionary ideas are adopted by educators

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, there was only one Black participant included in the study. Due to this limitation, this section was not able to amplify the voice of Black teachers from a multitude of perspectives.

<sup>36</sup> White non-binary teacher (4 years)

through an attitude of omission, in that a small presence of Black teachers becomes justification for not seeing or noticing racism. Such justifications showcase how teachers' attitudes become a reflection of the institution as a whole.

However, Fiona<sup>37</sup> is able to recognize some of the experiences that can come with being a visible minority in her work environment. She explains:

There's always this awkward Black History Month where somebody is designated with the job of doing Black History Month and they sort of try to handpick a few of the Black students in the community. And then sometimes there's this discussion around like, well, why aren't the Black teachers doing something? And I sort of delicately say, like, maybe it's not their job to have to speak on behalf of the Black community all the time, even though there seems to be this expectation.

She explains how there is an "awkwardness", and that planning programming for Black History Month is a "designated job" in February, pointing to the reality of how Black history is represented in elite schools; it is reserved for certain times during of the year, rather than positioned as an ongoing collective responsibility. Fiona also points out that there is an unfair expectation for Black teachers to represent the entire Black community, but that this is often a repeated occurrence due to a lack of awareness and the unchanging demographics of the school. Similarly, Megan<sup>38</sup> also points out some of the mishandling of Black History Month at her own school:

We have a couple of Black teachers and whether they are comfortable to or not, they are essentially put on display during Black History Month and so is our small Black student population. You know, everyone's just asked to participate and to read and to

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<sup>37</sup> White cisgendered female

<sup>38</sup> White cisgendered female

tell of an experience and share. But they're not asked to lead it. Those that are leading it are the History department, which are generally White men. So, I feel like, yes, their identity is used in that sense, like, okay, so here's your chance to shine. Black History Month because you're Black. Yay. [sarcastic tone].

Although both Fiona and Megan can show the ways in which privileged self-understanding are adopted by staff members in their community and point to superficial understandings of diversity at school – a similar critique found in Magwood's (2021) study. Their personal selection of examples also reflects the exclusionary nature of the elite institutional structure. Thus, the broader community's discourse comes bear on teachers' self-understandings. Black History is the sanctioned time to notice Black history, people and cultures, and therefore, teachers' selected stories of exclusion are tied to this event, a time when they too are more attuned to noticing. This omission can also speak to the ways they adopt exclusionary notions in what they fail to see in some of the daily forms of racism that Black teachers experience, which reflects some of the experiences of everyday racism of Black educators in US schools described by Pizarro & Kohli (2020) and Magwood's (2021).

Furthermore, recalling Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009a) framework, part of elite identity is founded on the aspect of exclusion, in that those within the school are there because of their perceived intrinsic qualities that frame them as successful, intelligent, and hard-working. Jesse, for examples, explains that "I work hard. I'm like confident in my skills and competent as an educator. So, I'm happy to earn my place in a school. And I think that was reflected in the fact that I got a permanent contract. I worked hard and earned that. So that's the way I look at it. It's not for everyone, but I know it was the right choice and the right fit for me." Jesse feels that their hard work fosters a sense of belonging and an ability to excel in this space. Amy also believes in

the necessity of hard work to not only enter the system, but maintain one's place within it: "So I'm good at my job because I am aware of the fact that they could get rid of me at any time and I need to make myself indispensable to the school by being involved in whatever I can be involved in, by being extremely supportive to my students. And it makes you a better teacher in a lot of ways." While Amy and Jesse share these exclusionary ideologies based on meritocracy, the next two experiences highlight the ways in which this discourse is not equally extended to Black teachers. Rather, they are subjected to racist stereotypes that diminish both their dignity and expertise. Amy recounts hearing racist comments about a teachers' intelligence and ability, just like the students described in Section 5.2.4 who faced questions around their position within the school:

There's one [Black] teacher in particular who I've heard people question her credentials. 'Should she really be teaching science and is she really qualified to teach that? She's not really like the smartest person.' And I've heard things like that from more than one person. And I don't often hear people questioning the intelligence or the position of people at the school very often. I've heard this more than once about this one specific science teacher who's a person of colour. So that has always struck me as quite odd, and I believe, has a racial undertone to it.

Amy can identify the ways in which racist comments position her Black female colleague as an outsider within the school by questioning her suitability based on intelligence and meritocratic ideologies. However, when Amy was asked if she could have critical dialogue with her colleagues, she admits that she found it difficult to confront their thinking. She offers further justification for not trying to by softening her language around the topic. She explains, "I don't necessarily think [my colleagues] are racist, but I do think that they have a predisposition

towards [this Black teacher] or certain feelings, certain prejudicial feelings towards her.”

Although she notices the inequity of the situation, her privileged self-understandings become evident through her inability to confront the situation or explicitly identify it as racist. Magwood (2021) labels these happenings as “White Blinders,” whereby, White individuals may conceptually recognize bias in one context, such as an anti-racism workshop, but are unable to attribute acts of racism to those in close proximity, such as colleagues and friends. It seems that in some ways, Amy wears these blinders.

Christopher describes his experiences as a Black male working in an elite institution and discusses the presumptions that his colleagues make about his place at the school:

What made me realize that’s how they viewed me is because of what someone said to me ‘I had no idea you were educated, and you had two degrees and all this stuff [...] They used the words, we thought that you were just some guy that the president [brought in], you were coming across hard times and he hired you as a coach.’ That’s what they thought. They said it to my face, and I was like, ‘Oh, shit.’ Now, during that two-year period, the only people who ever spoke to me were coaches. Regular staff, not a chance.

Due to the liberties that elite private schools have in their hiring practices, they do not necessarily have to hire educators or coaches with teaching degrees, nor must their staff be members of the Ontario College of Teachers.<sup>39</sup> At times, elite private schools will use this flexibility to bring in individuals with other specialized skills and qualifications. However, ungenerous assumptions were made about Christopher’s areas of expertise, in that he was initially perceived to be underqualified or lacking credentials. In both circumstances, stereotypes

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<sup>39</sup> The Ontario College of Teachers is a regulatory body that licenses individuals to teach in publicly funded schools in Ontario.

based on merit or intelligence were applied to the teacher's identities. Furthermore, classist and racist undertones were also placed on Christopher as his colleagues thought he was given the job because he was experiencing "hard times." He is demonstrably excluded from attributions of being hard-working or earning a place in the school based on merit. Christopher also explains feeling isolated working in this environment, as only teachers within his field would regularly engage with him. Bristol (2018) explores the experiences of Black male teachers in urban schools in the US. Although he does not explore the elite school context, he investigates the experiences that male Black teachers have who work at schools as either "Loners", with less than four Black staff members, or as "Groupers", with four or more Black teachers who work at their respective schools. He explains that Loners experience less job satisfaction and report feelings unable to interact with many colleagues because they feel that their White colleagues are afraid of them (Bristol, 2018). Christopher's personal experiences of erroneous judgments and feelings of isolation resulting from repeated interactions with White colleagues speaks to how colleagues' adopted beliefs affect the quality of his work relationships and overall experience working in an elite private school.

Furthermore, Christopher goes on to describe times in which he felt he was passed up for a leadership position, despite having the credentials, experiences, and being praised for his role as coach. He explains:

I wasn't even given the opportunity to interview for the job. If I were interviewed for the job and the other person got it, no problem. But to be told if this position becomes available, you're the first person I'm going to talk to, and then I was never talked to and then it was just given to someone else. That's my definition of being slighted.

Christopher describes the limitations that were placed on him when it comes to career advancement. He describes how a White colleague with less experience was given the new position. This experience echoes Bristol's (2018) findings that Black teachers felt that their White colleagues had more agency to affect school policy, which may account for some of the reasons why preferential treatment was shown toward White teachers for leadership positions. Thus, exclusionary practices shape both Christopher's experience and his career trajectory within the elite schooling environment.

Shay<sup>40</sup> claims that racist jokes and microaggressions are a common occurrence at school: "I had colleagues who would regularly misidentify Black colleagues as another Black colleague." He also goes on to share that during an athletic ceremony at the school, a teacher made racist remarks about a Black colleague. The teacher said: "Is [Mr. Z] here? It's kind of dark in here. Maybe he can smile." In addition to these common occurrences, he also brings up unfair discipline approaches. However, just like the Black students who were unfairly disciplined at school (Section 5.2.4), Shay also describes how a Black coach was unfairly subjected to disciplinary practices. He explains that there was a case of student bullying after a school sporting event and the administration and some teachers were looking to hold someone accountable for the incident, to the extent that other educators gave false information to implicate the coach, thereby putting him a position where he must defend himself. The Black coach had come to Shay for support in how to best navigate the situation, which is how learned that the coach had done nothing to provoke the events that happened. In this instance, exclusionary conceptions and practices held by educators were expressed as dishonest accusations and unfair

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<sup>40</sup> White cisgendered male

forms of discipline, thereby positioning Black teachers as outsiders within Shay's school community.

Christopher also describes his personal experiences of being reprimanded for an incident at school. To protect Christopher's anonymity, my account of the story has been intentionally left vague. Christopher and a White male teacher were both involved in an incident where their professional judgment was questioned due to a student complaint made to the students' parents and then passed onto administration. Christopher was eventually let go from his job, while the other teacher did not experience any disciplinary measures and is still employed by the school. Christopher felt unsupported by colleagues and felt that a thorough investigation was not done before he was fired. Christopher also felt that during this situation and others in the past, other teachers' identities, statuses, and close relationships with administration positioned them in a place to be protected, whereas he was let go from his job. This finding is echoed in Magwood's (2021) discussion of the lack of retention of Black and Brown teachers in elite private schools, often due to unequal expectations and scrutiny in comparison to White teachers.

### ***6.1.1 Summary***

This section primarily focused on how teachers adopt the privileged conception of exclusion. Although teachers attempt to critique these ideologies in their school communities, it is evident that exclusionary notions also become part of their own beliefs. It is through an attitude of omission, stereotypes about ability, or the expression of racist comments, that White teachers exercise superiority over their Black counterparts. Teachers like Jesse and Jeff attribute their inability to see inequity to a minority presence of Black teachers. Megan and Fiona's stories around inequity are tied to Black History Month, the school's seemingly only sanctioned time to notice Black individuals. Jesse and Amy attribute hard work as a determining factor for their

presence at an elite school, yet both unknowingly point to examples of how Black teachers' tenuous positions are not because of the absence of hard work, but rather, unfair opportunity or being questioned for their ability. As a Black male, Christopher describes his colleagues' perceptions that position him as an outsider within the school when it came to questioning his credentials, in addition to his feelings of isolation due to limited peer interactions. The notion of eliteness put forward by Angod and Gaztambide-Fernández (2019), is helpful for conceptualizing the unfair experiences that Black teachers have in elite institutions. As previously mentioned, these scholars point out that eliteness and whiteness are co-constitutive due to colonialism and that the founding purpose of the elite school to perpetuate the elite White subject. This may speak to why teachers readily adopt the aspect of exclusion; since Whiteness can be regarded as intrinsic to the institution, teachers' self-understandings may inevitably be shaped by ideologies of White supremacy. These forms of elitism may contribute to preserving an environment of disparity and White superiority in how they internalize and express exclusion (Angod & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2019). Since Whiteness – both historically and presently – are central to the operations of elite schools, it is evident why Black educators may feel closely surveilled and face harsher consequences in comparison to their White counterparts.

Furthermore, Black teachers are subjected to unfair forms of discipline, ultimately exemplifying that within the elite environment, Black teachers are under harsher scrutiny in contentious moments. Christopher describes feeling he was disciplined more harshly in comparison to White staff members, which he believes to be one of the primary reasons he was let go from his job. Shay echoes this disparity in his retelling of the erroneous accusations made toward a Black male colleague by other teachers and administrators following a sporting event. Magwood (2021) points out that there is a pattern when it comes to why elite schools struggle to

retain Black and Brown teachers. She acknowledges that there may be a small turnover “due to personal failings or to them not being a good fit” (p. 80), but that “long-term patterns of rapid turnover or repeated concerns being raised by Black and Brown teachers suggest that the problem lies in the school itself” (Magwood, 2021, p. 80). I suggest that my data speaks in support of this phenomenon. While unfair forms of discipline certainly present themselves in many contexts – including publicly funded schools – given the privatized model of education, it is also prudent to consider the mechanisms by which racist practices are preserved due to the particular culture of elite institutions. The following will further explore the structures of the privatized model of education.

The structure of elite private schools limits the avenues that Black educators can take in seeking accountability for inequitable treatment, which make it difficult for social justice advocacy to take root. Human Resource Departments (HRDs) varies from school to school, and usually only consists of a few individuals. Although HRDs are upheld as a resource for staff, the HRD members are ultimately still employed by the school. This power dynamic may limit the extent to which HRD employees seek to remedy a situation or whose interests they support. As well, principals or senior leadership may not be safe to voice concerns to because they are often the ones enacting the disciplinary measures, just like the educators and administrators who wrongly accused Shay’s Black colleague. The principal(s) must also answer to the parent and alumni community both indirectly, through the perceived pressures they feel from these stakeholders, and directly in the form of parent requests and directives from the board of governors. The board of governors is often comprised of members who are in close approximation to the school, such as alumni and parents of both current and former students. Board members’ relationships to the school is often publicly shared on the school’s website.

Therefore, leadership may not be a safe place to voice concerns based on inequity, given board members' positionality in these spaces. Additionally, it is uncommon for teachers in these schools to be unionized, leaving little support for teachers in an environment with clear power differentials. Christopher did not have the support of a union to help him navigate the accusations made against him or to advocate for a fair investigation to be completed. Ultimately, the members of elite institutions must answer to one another and are often void of external accountability and interventions. Such conditions can propel insensitivity to meaningful social justice advocacy in their pursuit of maintaining privileged self-conceptions.

## **6.2 Gendered Experiences and the Queer Teacher**

Teachers adopt privileged self-understandings through conceptions of gender, as gendered discrimination gives rise to exclusionary interactions and shape roles and responsibilities amongst colleagues. Existing literature examines the distinct gender roles in elite spaces based on traditional notions of heteronormativity and gendered stereotypes (Baker, 2013; McCarthy & Kenway, 2014; Pahlke et al., 2014; Spark, 2018). Some of the literature discusses how perceived gender differentials informs teachers' beliefs about how they educate boys and girls in single-sex elite schools (Baker, 2013). Taylor (2021) highlights the objectification of female teachers by male students in all-boy elite high schools. However, Variyan (2019a), whose focus is most similar to mine in this study, talks about how gender shapes the ways in which teachers conceptualize themselves in relation to elite schools. For example, women tend to feel that they are lucky to work at elite schools, while men feel self-assured and attribute their professional success to hard work. Variyan (2018) discusses misogynistic behaviour in how female teachers are treated by male staff in front of students, which reinforces the idea that males hold dominance over their female counterparts. Relatedly, this study finds that teachers' roles

and self-understandings are gendered, and within these differences, privileged self-conceptions are expressed through an enthusiasm to uphold patriarchal power structures as well as sexist attitudes.

Recall, exclusion as one aspect of elite of identification not only looks at how joining an elite community shapes one's self-understanding, but also how this membership is hierarchically organized, and subsequently how the workings of this structure come to bear on one's self-understanding once inside the institution. Through examining interview data, I will demonstrate that hierarchical understandings of gender shape teachers' experiences, whereby men have a greater sense of agency over their female counterparts, which comes to fruition in multiple ways. In the context of my study, agency refers to the freedom and/or ability to act or make choices despite constraining social structures (Campbell, 2009). The following factors are not mutually exclusive and often work together to create a situation where women are considered to be inferior in the work environment:

1. Women have less power and authority in leadership roles.
2. Men are less fearful of performance-based consequences or repercussions.
3. Teachers subscribe to gendered stereotypes equating femininity with weakness and masculinity with strength, especially when thinking about sports.
4. Women experience sexual objectification.

In this section, I explore the interplay of these variables in how they dictate experiences for my participating teachers and how they impact their self-understandings.

Fiona discusses gendered inequities when it comes to career advancement in her school; she feels that female classroom teachers are disproportionately passed over for leadership roles, and when they are selected, they do not receive the same level of respect as their male

counterparts. This signals a false sense of authority and leadership for women in elite spaces.

Fiona<sup>41</sup> explains:

There's not a lot of extra room for leadership or if there is leadership, it's mostly in title, not in terms of power. And since I've been there, only men have held the positions that have the most power and have the power to make decisions or change at the school. And the women who are in leadership positions don't seem to have the same authority and power. We've had three different heads of school, and in spite of some obvious female leaders in the school system, they have not been placed into a higher position. So, I feel like gender and sex really is an important part of the structure at our school. I'll go even further. If you look at all our admissions brochures, they have a lot of pictures of men in the pictures teaching the children. The only woman I can think is a sitting side by side having like an intimate kind of teaching moment with a girl. But in every other case, it's a cluster of kids and a male teacher.

Fiona describes that she works in an environment where the leadership model is marked by exclusionary ideas around gender. Gender plays a role in how teachers move into positions of power and significantly shapes their experience in that role. Fiona describes a structure where women are given leadership roles in title but not necessarily in authority, suggesting that traditional patriarchal notions are hidden under the guise of progress. She describes two situations in which holding a leadership position did not yield the results she hoped for. One testimony is her observation of a colleague who holds the title of department head and the other is a personal reflection of her own experiences as a department head.

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<sup>41</sup> White cisgender female

First, Fiona explains that a department head was asked to lead the staff in professional development, who declined because she believed it was beyond her personal scope of expertise. She also felt that professional development would be better received from someone external to the community. After declining, she communicated her discomfort and requested resources, but was repeatedly asked to lead the PD herself by a superior. However, Fiona explains that in her negotiating of the situation, “she’s trying to avoid having that type of relationship where it is confrontational, and it is problematic. So, I think she’s walking on eggshells trying to negotiate this because of how she’s watched [these types of] things unfold in the past.” Fiona describes a sense of fear that governs how her colleague negotiates this experience, especially with possible repercussions and labels that might be used against her in mind. Her boundaries as a professional seem to be under contestation due to colleagues not respecting her requests. Furthermore, Fiona, despite being in a position of leadership herself, also believes that her sense of agency is diminished. The qualms that she notices in her colleague’s experiences also speak to her own frustrations and understandings of how she must operate in her workplace. She explains: “I don’t think I’m ever in a position where I feel like I can say no.” Although she feels like she can “carve out sort of the type of job that [she] wanted in the school a little bit more” based on her experience and skill set she ultimately accepts how she is positioned in her work environment: “I just kind of said, I’m happy to be here and I’m happy to do whatever you need me to do. And that was really my approach. And I just volunteered and agreed to do whatever somebody asked me to do. So, I don’t think I’ve ever directly said, no, I can’t do something.” Not only have others adopted these exclusionary notions, but Fiona has assumed them herself; Fiona not only observes power differentials at a macro level in the structure of the school, but witnesses it through colleagues, and feels it herself in terms of how much power and agency she has to navigate her

space. She explains the consequences she feels that are applied to females: “I think it might be harder for women to be honest without coming across as being labeled as uncooperative or being problematic or perhaps more misogynistic terms.” Part of this lack of authority evidently comes with fear of performance-based judgements and consequences. She explains that “men can cherry pick what they want to do and what they don’t want to do a little bit more.” This freedom to “cherry pick” does not extend to herself as a female educator, but is something she distinctly sees in her male colleagues.

Christopher<sup>42</sup>, also observes that women do not have the same sense of agency and power in positions of authority. He notices that the women he works with do not exude the same confidence as their male counterparts and feels that there is a sense of pressure to conform due to social repercussions:

I think women weren’t given the respect that they deserved and in cases where women were given roles of authority, they didn’t yield that authority very well. They were almost trying to please everyone above them and not looking after their staff, so they had no problem [...] chucking people under the bus at any given moment because they didn’t want to be trapped under the bus because of the repercussions of what might happen to them as females. Whereas the males, they were completely confident in their positions, regardless if they are competent or not, to the point where there’s situations that happened that I have no idea how some of these guys are still teachers. And that’s after going as high as you could go to let the proper authorities know what is going on, but they’re still there.

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<sup>42</sup> Black cisgender male

Christopher describes how there are clear powerful differentials according to gender and illustrates that female leadership is given in title but not authority, again demonstrating that patriarchal notions of power still linger despite representation of female leadership. He believes that the women he worked with “didn’t yield their authority well” and feels that women in leadership roles often feel pressure to appease others in order to avoid confrontation or reprimand. In contrast, he can recall many examples of male leaders that are not reprimanded for things that he feels would have warranted disciplinary action. There seems to be a discrepancy in potential consequences – whether formal or informal – that shapes and dictates work relationships, reinforcing hierarchical rankings based on gender. These privileged self-conceptions, expressed as feelings of superiority or greater sense of agency due to diminished work-related consequences, dictate how men and women can act in the space. Despite the shared sense of opportunity to thrive as educators in elite institutions that was made evident at the beginning of this chapter, the ways in which educators can advance in their career is divided by gender.

Amy also shares that there are men in leadership positions at her school that she considers less proficient in their jobs than female counterparts. She explains:

I can think of the people that I feel are the most ill-fitting for their jobs are all men. I don't think that's my bias because I can also think of men who are really brilliant at their jobs, but the incompetence that I have experienced either first or second hand, is always by a man who, I have no idea how he got his job.

She goes on to describe how she notices this particularly with selected department heads at the school in which she works:

There are fewer male teachers [in the school]. I think that the ones that are there are given positions that I'm always sort of like really? [...] Is that a person that should be running a department because it doesn't even seem like they know how to run their own classroom. I was talking to someone in a different department and her department head is a man and she was asking me something about report cards. And I was like, 'Why don't you ask your department head?' She's like, 'Oh, because he's so laid back to the point that I feel like he has no idea what's going on.' So then why is he the department head? It doesn't make sense.

In contrast, Amy feels that it is difficult to draw boundaries between her home and work life and subscribes to the notion of working hard to make it and be successful in an elite school community:

And part of the reason that being a teacher is sort of really attractive to young women is because we see it as something we could easily do and balance the family at the same time. But I don't think it's that easy when you work in a private school because you get home later and you're working later. I'm constantly working at home. Because I just don't have enough time in the day to do everything I need to do because maybe I have one prep period, but then I get asked to fill in for absent teacher or maybe I'm planning on doing work after school but then a kid comes in and needs to talk about an assignment. And I'm talking to that kid for an hour and then I leave. I think working in a private school means being a good teacher because you have to be because you don't have a choice not to.

Amy explains that being a "good teacher" is not a choice and believes that in elite institutions, teachers must make themselves available and work hard. In the previous examples, it is

permissible for a male department head to be “laid back”, but for her, working hard is a necessity. She describes positions of authority held by male colleagues that she feels are questionable; thus, her personal understanding of what it means to be a successful teacher does not necessarily apply to male teachers in the same way. This signals some of the ways that both her and her colleagues concede to exclusionary notions based on gender, influencing how they operate as teachers in their work environment. The narratives of the broader school structure become internalized and impact how teachers understand their place within the school.

Jeff also speaks to dissimilar expectations that he has observed between males and females, especially when it comes to navigating responsibilities in the work environment. Echoing some of Amy’s concerns, he feels that women might need to overcommit or prove themselves more than males, and they tend to ask permission more often when making work-related choices:

But to be honest with you, I think that the expectations for female teachers in the school are higher than they are for the male teachers in the school in terms of how much of themselves they should commit to the school, which is kind of a strange thing for me to recognize. I guess I’ve felt that female teachers I work with feel more pressure to do more than the male teachers [...] because these expectations that are communicated in indirect ways. Where for someone like me, if I see that something hasn’t been communicated to me directly, I like to ignore whatever implied message might be being sent home unless I’m in some sort of danger. But because I sort of believe in clear direct communication as much as possible. And if people aren’t giving me that, then that’s fine. Then I just go by what I’ve read and heard directly.

Jeff expresses a sense of ease and confidence in maintaining work boundaries but feels that expectations are higher for females and that they often succumb to implicit pressures. He goes on to explain how this pattern fits the comportment of his male colleagues and the ways in which women approach work commitments. He finds that his female colleagues tend to seek permission or approval when attempting to draw boundaries in their professional lives.

And never in the conversations with my male colleagues there, I've never heard them ask, 'Do you think it's okay if I ask for this?' or 'Do you think it's okay? Do you think they're going to be upset if I don't go to this?' Whereas with my female colleagues, I would say it comes up at least once a week, a conversation where they're either asking me or asking each other if it's okay if they don't come to some talk that's happening at seven o'clock on a Tuesday night. 'Do you think I'm expected to go? Do you think they'll notice if I don't go?'

Jeff does not feel like he must justify his choices or ask permission before doing something, yet he describes this as a common practice amongst his female colleagues. Megan also witnesses that her male colleagues are more agentic within the respective courses that they teach. She notes that her male colleagues have an advantage in teaching their courses because parents and administrators do not question or criticize his pedagogical decisions:

But we did the program together. And when he was originally teaching the courses that I'm teaching, he was not questioned by administration or by parents for certain things. But the moment I started teaching it, even though we taught it in the exact same way and explained things to the families in the same way. Maybe it's because, he's a veteran teacher, I am a younger teacher. Maybe because he's a male and I'm

female. I don't know what it was, but it felt like I was being questioned at every turn and anything that he said was just accepted.

Thus, her teaching partner continues to assert agency in his role as English teacher, while Megan must defend and justify her teaching practices. Justifying curricular choices becomes a way that Megan understands her reality as a teacher, which differs from how she describes her male colleague's experience conducting his work.

Despite initially expressing an inability to see privilege based on gender, upon further reflection in a later interview, James<sup>43</sup> explains some ways in which he experiences advantage over some of his female counterparts. James comes to understand that being a male teacher allows him certain freedoms and comforts when navigating work relations, especially with authority figures. Since elite private schools are not unionized, positive relationships with superiors become even more important in terms of job retention. Much of his advantage comes with being able to foster relationships with leadership, with gender playing a significant role in how relationships are forged:

All of our big administration are male as well. So, I kind of have that bond with some of my vice principals in which I probably have a non-business relationship with them that probably a lot of the female teachers don't see because they're female. And it just might not be cool or professional. Not that it is unprofessional. But it may be interpreted a bit differently with the female teacher, for example. I can walk into my vice principal's office and just be like "Yo, do you want to have a coffee?" and then we just chat about stuff that is not school related. And then whenever we have school related stuff, we're just shooting the shit at the end of the day because it's not

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<sup>43</sup> White cisgender male

necessarily that I'm in trouble. But whenever there is an issue, it's a lot more casual than it probably is with some other teachers, probably just because it's male to male. So, I don't want to say more leniency, but maybe it's just more of an understanding or maybe even more of a willingness to kind of look the other way sometimes on very small things just because there is a little bit more of a relationship going on, you know.

James<sup>44</sup> identifies advantages that come with being male; he describes male bonding that allows him to relate with his superiors more effectively, whereas women are not quite afforded this opportunity perhaps due to heteronormative presumptions about one's sexual orientation. Similarly to how Christopher and Jeff describe instances where there is less fear of repercussion for men, James too articulates that he has the advantage of "more of an understanding" or "more of willingness to look the other way" when it comes to discussing work related issues. James, who works in a school where males hold the significant leadership roles, coupled with his ability to forge relationships based on gender, is a contributing factor as to why he is less fearful around work-related consequences. The self-understanding of exclusion is rooted in feelings of superiority over his female counterpart, which is expressed as a greater sense of agency to maneuver the work environment and build stronger relations with the leaders of the institution. These understandings of agency and power, also take expression in coaching and sports. Specifically, discrepancies in treatment become intensified, which ultimately emphasizes stereotypes that equate masculinity with strength, and femininity with weakness, thereby reinforcing sexist attitudes. Christopher explains:

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<sup>44</sup>White cisgender male

I could think of two situations where a female coach has basically been degraded by a male supervisor or former head of her program was a male. And it's because she was female. Like when you're telling someone you can't be so emotional when you coach, that's not something that was discussed amongst males. Like when a male coach is emotional, always passionate, when a female coach is emotional, oh, she's just emotional. Like it's not coming from the same place, apparently.

Some of the exclusionary conceptions that Christopher observes in his school environment frame female coaches as inferior. His observation exemplifies how male colleagues' beliefs lead to actions that "degrade" the female coaches. Jesse<sup>45</sup> also describes how female coaches at his school are treated unfairly, especially when coaching male students. Their recounting exemplifies traditional notions of masculinity, where men are active participants and women are passive observers, in turn, becoming an outlet for men to exert dominance and authority over females in the space.

**Jesse:** Female coaches, not a thing. Despite having 20 years of experience coaching a sport, she was replaced by a White male who had no experience coaching the sport that happened to play it in high school or undergrad. Doing and coaching are two different things, just like learning and teaching are two different things. She could have supported that new coach in their learning and she could have been their mentor. But because they were playing a male sport, despite her coaching male teams, she was still taken off that sport and replaced by someone else.

**Stephanie:** What was the response to that? Was anyone able to challenge or discuss it?

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<sup>45</sup> White non-binary

**Jesse:** No. And I understand where she's coming from. She's like, why would I continue to fight this? Because I know it's never going to change because she had the fight once when she was first taken off, like a couple of years ago. And then she was eventually brought back when they had a hole to fill. And she was the support coach, and she was like, they never agreed on what they what they were going to do when they were training, what coaching strategy they wanted to utilize. He made all the decisions, and she was basically like the manager. She's like, 'I want to coach too. I know what I'm doing.'

It is not only the decisions made by administration to replace the coach, but it is also how the male coach treated the female coach that reinforces this gendered dominance over the female coach, which places her as having a secondary role as the "support" coach or functioning as a "manager." The male coach's exclusionary attitude thwarted the agency of the female coach in this space.

Shay<sup>46</sup> describes that his interests aren't typically masculine, but that he was able to gain acceptance into the school community through expressions of typical masculinity in relation to athletic success when first arriving there:

Okay, so my interests are, you know, literature, politics, history, philosophy, music and after that, I might be interested in sport [...] And when I started to win games my first year there, now I started to get accepted by a whole group of people. I got invited out for beers, a group came into my basketball practice, a couple of teachers watched me with kids. It's very clear that I knew what I was doing.

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<sup>46</sup> White cisgender male

It is only when Shay is able to perform expected gender roles by coaching a successful basketball team that he is afforded the respect of his colleagues. It is not a role he resisted and something he continued to take part in due to the social benefits it offered him in the workplace. Unlike the female coach that Jesse discusses, Shay can use sports to elevate his status in the workplace. In addition to his personal experience, Shay also explains that the culture of the school prioritizes sports. He feels that there is a community who believes that “boys’ games are more important than anything else.” He observed that some of the male teachers used the privilege they enjoyed as coaches and became “lazy teachers who spent half the day working on football stuff,” ultimately prioritizing the game over other aspects of their work. Nonetheless, they were not questioned or subject to consequences for focusing more on sports than their teaching, rather, they were praised for their athletic feats. Their privileged self-conceptions are visible in their exertion of agency in creating a work environment that suits their own interests.

Furthermore, there are examples of sexual harassment toward women within workplace experiences. Variyan (2018), in his study on elite private schools in Australia, describes the misogynistic behaviour by male staff toward females in front of students, which reinforces the idea that males hold dominance over their female counterparts. Some of the participants of this study also describe similar occurrences. James, for example, describes some of the ways in which this unfolds:

Our head boss or head honcho is old and generally a White male. And I think a lot of the time what he says makes it tough on some of the women at our school just in the way in which he talks, some of the language he will use can be a little bit kind of bias[ed]. For example, acknowledging how a woman looks before acknowledging how smart she is or what she said, stuff like that will happen and he’ll get called out though.

We have a few very strong women at our school who will literally stand up. Think about going up to your boss in front of all of your colleagues and saying, ‘You can’t say that’. We do have a few staff members at the school who will do that. And it’s pretty good, right?

James recalls how a few vocal woman used their voices as an attempt to justify change.

Although it is important that women can vocalize concerns, broader support or accountability is lacking for the female teachers, as only “a few staff members [...] will do that.” James is not one of the few who share the burden, as he sees it as a task for “a very few strong women.” Shay also describes an incident in which a female staff member was sexually harassed by the principal but the female teacher did not receive broader support from teachers in the community. Shay tried to demonstrate allyship with female staff by joining them in advocating for an apology and a formal admission of wrong-doing. However, in his experiences of advocating for accountability alongside his female colleagues, he feels that the overall support of the staff was not strong. He explains that “the vast majority of staff did not take the right path [...] If it was more important to you to not rock your career boat or nurture your own illusions and misperceptions, what was ignorance before was now moral failure” due to the occurrence taking place during the “Me Too” movement, a time heavily focused on social change for women. Shay goes on to explain that elite private schools are not regularly held accountable to governing bodies, which creates insular thinking. He explains that “the danger of the private school is that it has its own bubble, they become less sensitive to social progress in human rights and employment law.” He feels that the ways in which the system operates creates cognitive dissonance amongst the faculty, whereby they act by one standard at work and another in the outside sphere. He says: “so many men teaching in that school, can witness the terrible behaviour toward females, hearing the

laughing of the students, think nothing of it, and go home and kiss their wife and read their daughter a story.” He goes on to describe an incident with a teacher that, in his opinion, encapsulates the way that women are typically treated:

This [female teacher] she was having a relationship with a [male teacher]. He would make a date with her, then break it one day. She had some instability. She was sitting on the floor in the hallway sobbing because of how her lover had treated her. It’s the freaking workplace. This is why people shouldn’t have relationships in the workplace, and if they do, there are some rules around that. It’s just a mess. This made her a little unstable. Not terribly unstable, but again, if you’re a bit unstable and you’re male and you deal with your dysregulation by bullying other people, that’s acceptable. If you have dysregulation and you’re female, and you deal with this by being upset or showing your sensitivity. This is part of the way we stigmatize, especially women. A man who does that is a tough guy, a woman who does that is hysterical, which literally means she has a uterus. That’s literally what that means because hysteron is uterus. Her treatment was unbelievable to me [...]

With a proper H.R. person, they would have given him a warning. Put them both on notice and create a more equitable workplace. Instead, they sent this lady packing because she’d only been there like six months. The severance they had to pay her was not very much. That was typical of the way [the school] treated women.

Shay describes the ways in which gendered stereotypes influenced how this woman was treated at work through her colleagues’ perceptions and attitudes of educators, which he describes as a contributing factor in her job. However, he describes that there is little to no social or financial repercussions that the male teacher had to face in this situation. Although Shay generally

recognizes how this situation was inequitable, he also expresses judgment of the female teacher's dysregulation, as following his description, he expresses, "It's the freaking workplace. This is why people shouldn't have relationships in the workplace." It becomes evident that power and agency are not afforded in same way for male and female teachers, as gendered stereotypes play into how men and women act, are treated, or thought about in elite spaces. Furthermore, the terms of employment in elite private schools differ from the publicly funded system, which influences how situations are addressed. Publicly funded educators have the support and protection of their union should there be a workplace conflict or concern. The "resources" available in elite schools may not offer the same help or reassurance. As previously mentioned, Human Resource Departments in elite schools are often comprised of a few individuals who are employed by the school, which could influence whose interests they protect, and the methods (or lack thereof) used to intervene on behalf of staff. Administrators have more discretion to determine which teachers are permitted to retain their job, since teachers' contracts do not protect them or guarantee employment in the same way that a unionized, publicly school in Ontario might do so. This design creates more freedom to determine who is a 'good fit' for the school, whereas full-time teachers working in public schools who are in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers (and subject to student enrolment) are guaranteed a job within the school board, even though it may not be at the exact same school from year to year. For teachers in private schools, it is difficult for the educator to challenge administration on potentially unfair consequences or wrongful termination based on the tenuous nature of their jobs. The following will continue to explore how exclusionary notions shapes teachers' experiences based on queer identity.

### 6.2.1 *Queer Identity*

All the participants of this study were able to provide examples of how they saw homophobia, transphobia, or biphobia within the school culture, whether through students, parents, or alumni. For example, James recounts that parents were angry about students being prompted to share their pronouns in a grade eight classroom. Jesse tells the story of an alumni using homophobic slurs toward a student that wore the symbol of a pride flag on his uniform in support of a school initiative. Seven of my eight participants shared evidence of teachers adopting exclusionary ideas around queer identity, however, there was a clear distinction in how themes emerged for teachers working in faith-based schools versus teachers who work in schools without a strong religious affiliation.<sup>47</sup> Those who discuss their experiences working in a school without a strong religious affiliation describe a shifting attitude, where some educators strongly adopt exclusionary ideas expressed as homophobia, but feel there is a degree of accountability, dialogue, and allyship. However, for those working in faith-based schools, expressions of exclusion and othering occurred through silencing and lack of visibility. The following will further illustrate these differences.

Jesse reflects on their experiences working in a school without a strong religious affiliation. They described a shifting perspective when it comes to supporting queer identity: “I’ll say over the last three years, it’s been a huge shift...there’s a lot of homophobia, but I think that we’re working to shift that culture toward one of being more inclusive and more welcoming and

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<sup>47</sup> Faith-based schools are used to describe schools that subscribe to or name a religious’ tradition as part of their school identity. Schools described as not having a strong religious affiliation do not strongly or officially align with one religious tradition. This term is used rather than “non-religious” or “non-denominational” because these schools are historically elite (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009b), and typically their origins emerge out of faith-based communities and may still have some school ceremonies, traditions, and symbols that reflects these origins, although the school may not strongly or explicitly identify with a faith community. As well, this does not mean that some families in attendance do not belong to a faith community presently or that historically the school did not heavily serve a particular religious community.

safer, which I think is a direction a lot of schools are taking.” Jesse explains that there are still many teachers who don’t feel a sense responsibility to engage with 2SLGBTQ+ topics and do not add diverse perspectives to their teaching. They explain that educators are “teaching their perspective, their viewpoint, their ideals, because they’re teaching the other cis White people about cis White people.” However, in speaking to a shifting culture, Jesse describes that administration has been more responsive to addressing homophobic, transphobic, or biphobic acts with the school. Jesse shares that because they are an openly queer person in the school, they are often consulted on issues of inequity that arise. Jesse articulates: “I’m consulted a lot by admin around it. This situation happened in this locker room. This scenario happened with the sports team. This happened between these two kids in this classroom. The teacher didn’t know how to deal with it.” Thus, they acknowledge the dialogue from administration around contentious issues that emerge.

Specifically, Jesse describes a situation where a male student used the f-slur and made homophobic threats in the locker room after a sporting event. In reflecting on this occurrence, they expressed that the resolution was not as effective as they would have hoped, and felt that advocacy from coaches was lacking:

It relies upon the coaches and unfortunately, who is traditionally coaching? Straight cis White men. And who traditionally feels targeted by these conversations? Straight cis White men. So, they’re not going to do anything about this, unfortunately. I will give credit where credit is due. There are some coaches who really have done the work and I appreciate them because they’re building a better culture for their team. But as a student, if I was the captain of a team and the coach wasn’t pushing that message, it’s going to make me less likely to push that same message. If the coach is

doing it, I'd feel supported calling kids out and saying, 'Hey, we don't do that' because I know the coach is like, 'Yeah, agreed'. But we're not going to bench a kid for being racist or homophobic, we're not going to bench a kid for being Islamophobic if they're the star athlete.

Thus, there are still internal rankings illustrating how teachers subscribe to ideas that dictate to whom and how consequences are employed. Specifically, the teachers' actions show that they favour the heterosexual cisgender athlete over protecting the safety, security, and dignity of the queer person. Although the coaches are making decisions in relation to students, it simultaneously communicates to queer colleagues that they value their safety, security, and dignity less than that of their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts. Jesse describes how these attitudes call them to consider how they personally navigate the space and interact with colleagues and students alike. Furthermore, when discussing teachers at their school, Jesse explains that there is an ideological divide in how queerness should be shared in educational spaces:

And I don't fault teachers who are in their 40s or 50s. They started teaching at a time when it was not okay to be out in the classroom. And it still isn't, like some people are like 'you shouldn't talk about that'. I'm like, 'okay, that's your perspective. I have a very different opinion on it and we're never going to agree'. So, I don't fault teachers who are like, I don't feel comfortable disclosing to my classes because I just don't think there's a point or a purpose or a place. So, I don't fault them for that. And we have like an average age that's a little older. But there are some [younger staff] that are out to their students.

They explain that there is a divide and some judgment in terms of how and when queer teachers can be out about their gender identity or sexual orientation. Jesse's testimony suggests a shifting perspective within the school, with some educators harbouring traditional sentiments and others working to establish new ways of being. Jesse's discussion suggests that some teachers may still subscribe to exclusionary notions, for example, in how they address students for insults toward one's identity or how queer identity should be expressed in public spaces in the school.

Jeff also works at a school without a strong religious affiliation. He describes the school as being supportive of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and explains that he does not notice behaviours, actions, or attitudes that would demonstrate exclusionary ideas or inequitable treatment:

I don't really see it, and in fact there is one teacher there who is openly queer, and everybody knows it. I haven't sensed any sort of different treatment of that person. But again, being in the position I'm in, I may not pick up on it. I may be blind to certain things that are going on.

However, he then goes on to describe an incident regarding a student's use of homophobic language shared on a public online platform and speaks about his reservations about how it was addressed. The way he responds and reflects on the administration's actions reveal that he still adopts some exclusionary notions based on identity:

Even the language used for [leadership roles] is changing because they don't want to necessarily use [gendered language] to be [inclusive of all]. I remember the punishment given to this student for using the word dykey to describe a person. And I think it was intended as a joke. I think the girls knew each other pretty well. And it's not that I didn't think there should be any repercussions for it, but the punishment was

she could not be [one of the leaders in the school]. And everyone knew that it was going to be her position. And then to have that taken away, I thought for a kid who's 16 or maybe 17, I thought it was pretty extreme. And I thought if it were a teacher who did that, I could understand there being some severe consequences for using language like that. But for a student in a non-official context to use, even that word itself is not necessarily overly negative, I think. [...] I understand the message that they were trying to send to the community, but to put all that on that one kid and this kid is a sensitive kid too.

Although the official stance of the school is to remove the leadership title of the student, Jeff shares a sense of disagreement and feels that a lesser consequence should be employed. I do not wish to entertain a discussion of what the correct course of action should be in this situation but rather, would like to focus on Jeff's rationale for a lesser consequence as evidence of adopting the elite identification of exclusion. He justifies his thinking by downplaying the actions of the students by labelling it as a "joke" and explains that the word is "not necessarily overly negative." He attempts to normalize it because the girls "knew each other" and, ultimately expresses that it was a "pretty extreme" punishment. In his justification, it is evident that he is prioritizing one identity over another, specifically, he is following a pre-existing ranking system that places heterosexuality above queer identity. He is signalling that the repercussions should not impinge on the student's agency or her right to demonstrate excellence and engagement through leadership roles based on her place and identity in the school (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). Thus, both Jesse and Jeff experiences illustrate ways in which teachers adopt exclusionary ideas, but also show that there is a shifting institutional stance which softly gestures toward progress or change.

However, the way these ideas are expressed in faith-based schools positions queer people more strongly as outsiders through lack of visibility and expressions of homophobia. Teachers' privileged self-conceptions by way of exclusion reflect the institutional stance as a whole. Shay<sup>48</sup> describes the heteronormative practices that he comes across in his school's culture: "there was never a teacher who was out at work." This excerpt illustrates the silence and avoidance of queerness at school. He explains that at times, some male teachers who were in the performing arts – a role that is not typically associated with heteronormative expressions of masculinity – would be on the receiving end of anger and hostile behavior from staff members. For example, he recalls that when a male teacher would encourage students to attend rehearsal for a school production over sports practice, "in the context of their anger, you would hear homophobic slurs about [that teacher]" from the coaches at the school. Not only do these conceptions mark the interactions of the teachers that Shay observes, but they also shape how he operates in the space. Shay describes offering rebuttals to his colleagues' homophobic comments, and admits that he wishes he could say it was because he is "an amazing ally" or "an ally of all gay persons." Rather, Shay admits that he made "smart remarks" in defence of the teacher outside of school because this teacher was his friend, and he admired his work. He explains that if there was opportunity for people to be open about "their situations" in elite schools, it would create more opportunity for a "culture of acceptance [to become] normal." He goes on to explain that the way the school operates makes queer people less visible and "reinforces cultures of exclusion." Of course, it is not just "the school", but Shay's actions and those of other teachers that reinforce these conceptions. Shay reflects the institutional stance and embodies these exclusionary self-conceptions; not only does he outwardly admit to this, but it is also significant that the one time he

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<sup>48</sup> White cisgender male; English, philosophy and social science teacher (30 years)

feels capable of interjecting on behalf of a friend is when he is not physically located on the school grounds. The lack of respect and safety spurred on from educators' homophobic insults perpetuates a culture of silence by reinforcing idealized conceptions of heteronormative masculinity.

Exclusionary conceptions are brought to light through teachers' inability to discuss certain topics due to judgment. Fiona goes on to describe an experience working in a faith-based school:

I was talking with two people, and they didn't understand people wanting to have a choice of pronouns. Now these are two highly educated people and I found myself explaining to them why some people will put she/her or they/them next to their name on different online platforms. And they even had to ask my friend, who identifies as a woman, why would she even bother? And I had to explain that it was a way of showing solidarity.

She goes on to describe an incident that occurred when talking with another colleague in the school:

But even recently, I brought up a sort of a personal issue with a colleague and talking about pronouns of a relative. And she said, 'I just don't get that stuff'. And I said, "Well if it was your [family], you'd have to figure it out." And she goes, 'Yeah I guess I would, but thank goodness I don't'. And so, like boom, the door closed right there with that comment. And this is somebody I consider a friend of mine, but it's just very clear to me that a lot of people are not even close to that. I can't imagine having a public conversation.

As a result of the comments, Fiona explains that it is “part of me and my family life that I don’t really share with people because there’s a lot of judgment around that within our community. And we’re not really open to even having a conversation about it in many cases.” Although Fiona does not identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, she still feels othered by her colleagues in the workplace. Like Fiona, Amy<sup>49</sup> speaks to the lack of openness and visibility of queer identity at her school. She explains, “I mean, to my knowledge, there are no openly gay people who work for the school. I don’t know that an openly gay person would get hired. I would be surprised if they would.” Again, her inability to engage further in the discussion and her description of the school points to silencing and exclusionary notions that dictate who is permitted to enter or feel safe in the space. She expresses that she would be “surprised” if an openly queer person would be hired, signalling a shared notion of who is permitted to be visible in the space.

When Christopher was asked to discuss instances of inequity or disadvantage based on queer identity in the school, he avoided the topic and responded by discussing the limitations of the sexual education program offered at his school. In our discussion, he did not bring up topics around queer identity but focused instead on the danger of heterosexual pornography in promoting sexual violence amongst youth, pointing toward his own discomfort and inability to discuss the topic. When redirected and asked the question again, he mentioned there was once a bisexual student who was not fully supported with their mental health, who eventually left the school. He explains “I can’t say for sure if part of the treatment that she received was because of that [...] I can’t say for certain, but I also can’t say that it didn’t happen.” Christopher’s description suggests that the bisexual student’s experiences were not fully visible, as her

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<sup>49</sup> White cisgender female

concerns did not seem to be heard. His initial avoidance and vague discussion of the topic illustrates how he shares in these conceptions.

Megan<sup>50</sup> explains that there is a need to engage with topics around queer identity but feels that the school is not quite ready to fully do so. She makes a distinction between the staff and the institutional stance in terms of readiness to explore:

And we've been told, just be honest but stick within the guidelines of the school and then the question becomes, so what are the guidelines of the school on this topic? Because we don't have anything written and then you get crickets. As I said, it feels like the school is not ready to tackle certain things, but the staff and the kids are ready. And so that's where that disparity lies because you're like, what do I do? What do I say? I think my school's got my back if I help this kid because it's helping a child, but they also have a face to save with a certain community, and then it becomes tricky.

Although she distinguishes herself from the school, she seemed uncomfortable responding to my interview questions as she avoids specificity:

**Stephanie:** So just going back to this idea of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation from the teacher's perspective, so colleague to colleague support. Are those topics that can be discussed or spoken about?

**Megan:** It seems to be the case that, yes, I mean, everyone's got their friend groups, and everyone can do what we're doing in friend groups. But generally speaking, I'd have to say that everyone is very supportive of each other, of each other's needs, of each other's lifestyle and you ask your colleagues how they're doing, you ask how

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<sup>50</sup> White cisgender female

they are. What things they're experiencing and what not. And people are generally open and share and if they don't, you respect their privacy. And I feel like everyone, at least topically, supports everyone else's choices [...] There's always a one off that maybe someone will say something that kind of counteracts everybody else, but for the most part, I think everyone is very supportive of each other and understands that you're not in this alone. We've all got shit we're dealing with here and that stuff is, you know, not a priority. It's just making sure that everyone's okay and on the same page.

Although Megan's attempt to make a distinction between the school's position and those of her colleagues, it is evident that they are parallel to one another and not in opposition. Megan first suggests that conversations can be had within friend groups, but not the broader community. However, she uses words like "lifestyle" to describe gender identity and sexual orientation, which is problematic because her comment suggests that sexual orientation can be changed. She goes on to explain that everyone "topically" supports one another, which suggests that her colleagues may simply position themselves as politically correct rather than creating room for genuine dialogue. She is dismissive of the need to create space for queer identity as she states: "we've all got shit we're dealing with here and that stuff is, you know, not a priority" which seems to diminish the importance of engaging with these topics. Although the general well-being of her colleagues was a sentiment that came through, it is clear through her use of language that she has not delved into learning about 2SLGTQ+ history, people, or culture, which mirrors the school's institutional stance. Learning more about queer identity in relation to school experiences, from either the perspective of students or educators, does not seem to be a topic that Megan has taken up through her own professional development or within the school community.

Further, Taylor et al. (2015) share that religion can be a determinant of how educators feel they can respond to anti-2SLGBTQ+ incidents within their school community, with many teachers less likely to feel empowered to respond if their religion disapproves. This finding may speak to Megan's description of how she navigates her workplace politics. Megan says it is "tricky" to engage with topics pertaining to queer identity because there is nothing explicit written in the school's policy and she feels that the school is accountable to a "certain community", which includes parents and members of religious groups who disapprove. Megan seems to have adopted an approach of ambiguity, thereby reflecting the institutional position.

### **6.2.2 Summary**

This section focused on how exclusion is embodied and enacted amongst teachers. This study finds that teachers' roles and self-understandings are gendered, and within these differences of experience comes exclusionary notions expressed through patriarchal power differentials and sexist attitudes, resulting in men having a greater sense of agency and power over their female counterparts. Although the onset of this chapter reminded us of teachers' feelings of superiority that come with working in elite schools, I have found that there are further rankings once *in* the school; women feel they have less power and authority in leadership roles and that men are less fearful of performance-based consequences, illustrating their increased agency. James admits that bonding with his male superiors affords him better relationships and softer consequences when issues arise, which he believes does not extend to women in the same way. Amy describes her inability to draw clear boundaries with work responsibilities and her home life. In contrast, Jeff feels that he can "ignore" implicit expectations made of him while his female colleagues often seek "permission" when attempting to create distance between their professional and personal lives. Christopher says that he feels women are given formal titles that

are not accompanied by any corresponding authority, and Fiona echoes these observations by affirming her inability to decline requests made of her, despite being in a leadership position.

Furthermore, teachers subscribe to gendered stereotypes equating femininity with weakness and masculinity with strength, especially when thinking about sports. Both Jesse and Christopher describe this in the world of coaching; Christopher talks about how showing emotion is seen as a sign of weaknesses for female coaches and has witnessed female staff be reprimanded for expressing their emotions. Jesse discusses the demotion of a female coach who was replaced by a male coach with less experience. In their retelling of the events, it becomes apparent that the lack of collegial support and the male coach's assertion of superiority in this role also reinforces this hierarchical ranking. Shay benefits from heteronormative performances of masculinity through being a successful basketball coach, a role he accepts partly due to the social benefits it offers him in the workplace. Lastly, instances of sexual objectification shape women's experiences, as both Shay and James describe inappropriate, sexualized comments made about female teachers, with little to no collegial support or advocacy provided for them.

The stories and perspectives shared by participants work in tandem to highlight how exclusionary conceptions adopted by teachers enforce the hierarchical rankings in their schools, and significantly shape how they forge relationships and carry themselves in the workspace. Teachers' exclusionary perspectives are embodied in male teachers feeling superior and having greater agency than their female counterparts. Thus, there are clear gender differentials that adversely govern work relations compounded by a scarcity of opportunities to disrupt patterns of inequity. Voicing concerns through individual or collegial advocacy becomes an insurmountable task due to the lack of union support and the possible repercussions that come with advocating for change in a perilous environment. Some of the participants gesture toward these

consequences. Recall, Fiona discussed difficulties saying no and her fear of being labelled uncooperative, which would negatively impact career advancement. Amy points to the necessity of working hard in her role, while male colleagues can be “laid back” and can lack professional proficiency and still maintain their positions. Shay describes a female teacher being fired due to displays of emotional dysregulation because of a romantic relationship at work, whereas her male counterpart did not receive repercussions of any kind. There may be an unwillingness for those who hold privileged self-conceptions to relinquish the benefits of being in these positions over their female colleagues, as moving with greater ease becomes part of their professional identity. This factor alongside the absence of external accountability or networks of support for those in vulnerable positions, leaves less room for gender inequity to be challenged in meaningful ways.

Secondly, teachers also adopt exclusionary practices around queer identity, through different expressions of homophobia, transphobia, or biphobia characterized by an institution’s relation to faith-based communities. Schools without a strong religious affiliation exemplified inequitable treatment but showed promise of a shifting perspective, whereas queer identity in faith-based schools was often not visible and silenced by hostile treatment. Thus, exclusionary ideas are expressed by educators through silencing, where queerness is not fully seen, heard, or respected. This may occur because there is a degree of accountability that schools are held to in maintaining the beliefs of the affiliated religious institution. This may narrow the methods and approaches that a school adopts if the religious perspective has disapproving beliefs (Taylor et al., 2015), influencing how teachers relate to colleagues and conceive of their role in this space. It may stifle teachers’ initiative in engaging with these topics, thereby limiting avenues for self-awareness and growth. Christopher’s initial avoidance of and inability to speak concretely about

queer topics shows that his personal beliefs reflect the institutional stance of ambivalence. Shay also notices homophobic slurs made toward male staff members who do not present as stereotypically masculine and describes his difficulties interjecting due to lack of visibility of queer issues. As well, he uses traditional expressions of masculinity to gain acceptance in the space through sport. Megan, for example, despite separating herself from the institutional position, reflects the school's beliefs. This is expressed through her feelings of stasis when it comes to addressing queer issues and through the inability to engage concretely with topics related to queer identity, which stems from the need to be accountable to a "certain community." Whereas Amy bluntly expresses that she would be surprised if an openly queer person were hired at her school, signalling exclusionary conceptions that she has come to accept. The participants work at schools that are typologically elite (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009b), which means they are self-governing and do not receive public funding. Therefore, these schools are not subjected to the local school board guidelines when it comes to addressing topics around the 2SLGBTQ+ community. If it does not infringe on law, the direction of the school concerning these topics is up to the school leadership in conjunction with religious perspectives of the parent community, which can strongly influence how 2SLGBTQ+ identities are approached.

Collectively, these experiences add to the literature on teachers in elite private schools. As mentioned previously, existing literature focuses more heavily on teachers' positive feelings and strong commitment to elite institutions. While this is certainly not untrue, there is more to the story. The commitment to the school or privileges that teachers have access to are also marked by further hierarchical rankings, which can create significant barriers for self-actualization or expressions of authenticity. A teacher's identity will lend itself to different experiences and privileged self-understandings taken from the greater ideology, which have the

potential to negatively impact the quality of their experiences. We saw this with some of the stories of inequity that female, Black, and queer educators shared in this study. The lack of collegial support or union protection creates less opportunity for teachers to vocalize feelings of inequity. As well, it limits space for teachers to explore alternative perspectives, and the adopting of intuitional beliefs takes the forefront because of the structures and ideology in place.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions & Further Implications

This study aimed to explore the creation of privileged self-understandings through considering teachers' experiences in elite private schools. Recall the questions that framed this study: How do teachers working in elite private schools experience and negotiate privilege? How might these experiences engender privilege or how might they challenge it in their everyday practices? This chapter begins with a synthesis of the findings from Chapters 4, 5 and 6. I then elaborate on each finding and detail this study's implications. Lastly, this chapter will conclude by identifying limitations and areas for further research. The key findings are as follows:

1. Teachers attempt to challenge privilege, but still maintain and support the structure of the elite private school environment:
  - a. Teachers perceive that the greatest ability to challenge privilege is through classroom lessons, discussions, and extra-curricular involvement. However, this work primarily engages with privilege as a possession based on social location, rather than privileged self-conceptions. Consequently, it does not dismantle the privileged self-understandings of students (and their families). Teaching about privilege in the abstract without necessarily challenging students' privilege creates a place of contradiction, where students are learning from how things are done rather than what is being explicitly said or taught. (Chapter 4)
  - b. Teachers support and maintain students' privileged self-understandings in a variety of educational spaces; privileged conceptions take expression differently according to teachers' social landscape, but teachers are united in their ability to reinforce aspects of elite identification (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a).  
Discipline, selecting units or topics of study, extra-curriculars, student feedback,

and grading and assessment practices are all places where students' privilege is reinforced despite tension or personal conflict that arises. This often happens due to fear and a sense of surveillance that teachers feel subjected to by students, parents, and administration alike. (Chapter 4)

2. Teachers adopt privileged self-understandings, especially according to the aspects of elite identification surrounding excellence, exclusion, and engagement. It shapes how they conceive of their responsibility and work as teachers in relation to students and their interactions with colleagues.

a. Particularly, teachers favour high achievers and athletes, while they position English Language Learners and Black students as outsiders because of the extent and degree to which they feel responsible to support these students in elite environments. (Chapter 5)

b. Teachers assume exclusionary notions around race, gender, and sexuality, which shape their collegial relations by subjecting teachers to rankings and inequitable practices based on identity markers. Teachers' roles, responsibilities, and degree of agency are positioned according to identity markers, disadvantaging educators through racist discourse as well as patriarchal and heteronormative ideals. (Chapter 6)

In the subsequent sections, I will elaborate on each of these findings and share considerations for various stakeholders in the educational community.

### **7.1 The Aware Teacher-Attempts at Challenging Privilege**

I use the term “Aware Teacher” to denote the awareness that educators have of the privileged environments they work in, as well as their belief in the capacity to disrupt it through school programming and classroom lessons, oriented toward teaching students about the advantages that come with their social location and the inequity in access to material resources (4.1). This takes expression, for example, through teachers unpacking the Eurocentric curriculum during a lesson or deconstructing the representation of Black Americans in mainstream media in an English class. Teachers’ actions also include promoting initiatives to provide resources to vulnerable populations or to encourage interfaith dialogue. However, this work does not change the structure, nor does it challenge the privilege of students since this work engages with privilege as a topic or subject to discuss, rather than confronting the privileged self-understandings that the students and families hold themselves. When thinking about privileged self-understandings, more work is needed to disrupt them.

### **7.2 The Complicit Teacher – Supporting and Maintaining Students’ Privileged Self-Understandings**

The “Complicit Teacher” signifies that despite teachers’ efforts in the classroom or through extra-curricular involvement, they maintain and/or support students’ privileged self-understandings through the five aspects of elite identification – engagement, envisioning, entitlement, excellence, exclusion (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009a). This does not mean that they do not experience tension or partake in endeavours that question their integrity as educators in their support of the Five Es. “Complicit teachers” often feel that they must succumb to actions and behaviours that are in opposition to their own values, beliefs about professional practice, or their personal integrity due to student and parental pressures and a lack of administrative support.

Fear of disciplinary measures and social consequences – whether formal and informal – are a salient part of the mechanisms that enable this behaviour; that is, students' privileged self-understandings affect how teachers operate extra-curricular choices, how they can discipline students, what advice they offer, and even how they plan their units of study.

Particularly, teachers reduce or feel forced to evade disciplinary practices that might undermine students' conceptions of excellence, engagement, or their visions of an elite future (4.2.1, 4.2.2). Teachers feel they must censor ideas based on the class ideologies of a wealthy, conservative parent community (4.2.3) or curtail what they teach to abide by how students and parents perceive equitable treatment (4.2.5). Some teachers have made small attempts to challenge students' privilege, such as Christopher in his class discussing the hierarchy of the education system with students, or in Fiona's willingness to have private conversations about alternative pathways to a university education (4.2.3). While teachers have some agency in this respect, their behaviours do not significantly influence students' entitlement or conceptions of how they envision an elite future, given the conflicting messages at school and in broader society.

Due to the centrality of academic success to students' privileged self-understandings, grading assessments is frequently a site of tension and contestation when parents or students feel inhibited to privileged conceptions. Particularly, this study found that teachers perceive that students and parents feel entitled to high grades and teachers therefore feel monitored in their assessment practices (4.3.1). This monitoring may happen in the form of negotiation from students, intervention from parents, enforcement from administration, or various combinations of these stakeholders. Monitoring takes expression in both external and internal systems. Teachers are disciplined or questioned when ideals are not met and they become complicit in these

conceptions by pre-emptively giving higher marks to avoid conflict or altering assessment practices to ensure academic success (4.3.2, 4.3.3). Despite teachers' described frustrations and disagreement with student entitlement, they maintain and support aspects of elite identity especially around conceptions of excellence, in large part due to a sense of surveillance and fear of disciplinary measures or losing one's job and the benefits that come from teaching in elite institutions.

### **7.3 The Privileged Teacher – Adopting Privileged Self-Understandings in Relation to Students**

The "Privileged Teacher" speaks to how educators adopt privileged self-understandings, especially along the notions of excellence, exclusion, and engagement. These self-conceptions shape the way teachers understand their role at school and also influence their comportment and treatment of students. Teachers feel it is their job to teach the elite student, therefore, their perceptions and approaches are directed towards high achievers, athletes, or those heavily engaged in the school through extra-curriculars, in lieu of taking responsibility for providing support for those with academic difficulty or those they feel are outside the parameters of the ideal, which can include students with learning challenges. This lack of responsibility took expression through offering fewer interventions for those failing, disingenuous use of educational platforms, and through language that questions the students' place at the school (5.1).

Teachers also believed that they did not have the resources to support ELL students (5.2.1, 5.2.2). However, the institutional position is one of abundance; despite the school having access to resources, it is not that teachers don't have the resources to support students, it's that teachers choose not to allocate them in that direction. It is evident that educators assume this

understanding in their professional practices, illustrated through behaviours such as inconsistency in offering accommodations or supports, using burdensome language around supporting ELL learners, lack of classroom engagement, or by not re-enrolling students.

Teachers adopt attitudes, dispositions, and practices that position Black students as outsiders along the lines of both race and class (5.2.3). Particularly, when conflict occurs, participating teachers presented racist assumptions vividly through exclusionary language and quite distinctly by using unfair forms of discipline with Black students (5.2.3), ultimately exemplifying that within the elite environment, Black students do not benefit as much from the system as their status is under negotiation and contestation, especially during moments of contention. This is especially prevalent for Black students attending on scholarships or bursaries, who are asked to leave the school when they do not fulfill ideal images, whether socially or academically. There is often a lack of teacher advocacy or support leading up to these students being exited, which holds implications for the schools' final outcomes.

#### **7.4 The Privileged Teacher – Adopting Privileged Self-Understandings in Relation to Colleagues**

This section explores how the “Privileged Teacher” takes expression through interactions with colleagues. This study found that teachers adopt privileged self-understandings around notions of exclusion, which subject teachers to rankings and inequitable practices based on identity markers. Black teachers are a minority in elite institutions and some of the exclusionary attitudes around ability and merit marks their experiences at work through stereotypes and racist treatment, and may be part of the reason why racialized teachers are underrepresented in elite schools (6.1). Furthermore, educators and administrators discipline Black teachers unfairly, ultimately exemplifying that within the context of the elite environment, Black teachers are

subjected to close monitoring, especially during moments of contention. Lastly, there is also a theme of White colleagues and administrators ‘not knowing’ when it comes to identifying inequities that Black teachers face. My study participants are unable to recognize anti-Black racism and believe their ignorance is a result of a minority presence of Black educators in their respective schools. In essence, they adopt an attitude of omission, signalling exclusionary ideas that teachers internalize from the broader school ideology that are part of their self-conceptions as educators (6.1).

Further, this study finds that teachers’ roles and self-understandings are gendered, and within these differences of experience, come exclusionary notions that teachers express in patriarchal power differentials and sexist attitudes. These dispositions result in male teachers feeling entitled to a greater sense of agency and superiority over their female counterparts. Female educators often feel they must seek permission, fear being labelled as confrontational due to possible repercussions, or experience sexual objectification (6.2). Secondly, teachers also adopt exclusionary practices around queer identity, with expressions of homophobia, transphobia, or biphobia expressed differently according to an institution’s relation to faith-based communities. This study finds that teachers working in schools without a strong religious affiliation describe inequitable treatment but that there is more dialogue and evidence of shifting perspectives. Queer identity in faith-based schools was often invisible and/or silenced by hostile treatment or microaggressions (6.2.1). Teachers assume these exclusionary conceptions through their inability to discuss questions about queer identities or through their lack of advocacy for queer educators. Some teachers describe feeling othered by homophobic comments, while some teachers find it difficult to respectfully engage with topics pertaining to queer identity. The mechanisms of inequity described above can be partly attributed to the structure of the elite

private school. Elite private schools often lack genuine supports for teachers to navigate the system, such as a robust Human Resource Department or union protection. With little internal support or few external accountability measures in place, teachers may be more prone to adopt privileged self-conceptions into their workplace identity.

### **7.5 Further Implications**

While this study has found that the ways teachers address privilege neither changes the institutional structure nor completely impacts the way privileged self-conceptions are formed, I do affirm the work that is being done and recognize it as a necessary step to instill awareness of how privilege exists in the world. If positive change is to be triumphant, we must never undervalue or fail to see what is already at work in service of the same goal. Failure to do so is often what encourages forms of resistance to emerge to new ideas or when there are difficulties in mobilizing knowledge to professional settings. Accordingly, I propose an approach to professional development aimed at expanding teachers' conceptions of privilege that begins with clear recognition of what is already underway, so as to signal a collaborative and collective journey of growth, rather than a task riddled with condescending or egotistic intentions ("What you're doing is all wrong" or "This is how you do it"). The aim is to expand educators' paradigms through professional development so that questions like, "What advantages do we have, and how can we share these advantages and resources with the others?" also include questions such as:

- Who have I become because of the experiences, environments, and advantages I have acquired and ways in which I acquire them? What might this teach me about my place in the world?
- What stories do I have about success? How does this shape my decisions and actions?

- What are some limitations or barriers that come with my experiences or the stories I believe in?
- What might it take to unlearn or become aware of these barriers for the purpose of creating space for others?

I do not believe that change is easy or automatic, but my intention in suggesting additional professional development for teachers is to continue to create room for an alternate narrative to blossom. Continuing to understand how privileged self-conceptions are formed facilitates more awareness and encourages teaching practices geared toward addressing privilege both in classroom lessons and informal spaces.

It is also evident that power differentials and the mechanisms that exist among parents, administrators, and teachers should be investigated further. Particularly, the pervasiveness of parental control was more than I anticipated, as their presence serves as a filter for teachers' decision or they act as disciplinarians. I am not claiming that parents should not be involved in their children's education, rather, concerns arise in terms of how much power parents hold in elite schools because there is less protection for teachers when parental requests enter the realm of inequity. The degree to which parents maintain power may not be experienced in affluent schools in the publicly funded system simply because of differences in the educational model. In elite private schools, there is not as much accountability for parents because they are paying for their child's education directly and are often serve on the board of governors, which holds substantial decision-making power. Parent council, common amongst private and public schools, is focussed on allocating school resources, which is certainly different than a board of directors whose members are responsible for making pertinent decisions about the direction of the school. This allows for parents' misbehaviours to not be held accountable, or propels a stark imbalance

in power, leaving teachers more vulnerable as parents can more easily exert their agency at the expense of educators' livelihood or their moral imperatives. Comparing accountability measures for teachers in public and private schools makes clear the limitations of the model that elite private schools follow. The public reports issued by the Ontario College of Teachers about educators whose jobs are called into question, often detail quite serious offences. In some cases, accusations are found to be unsubstantiated following an investigation, and teachers are permitted to keep their jobs. This process of discernment which involves different people with a certain degree of distance from the case, creates accountability for all stakeholders. However, my participants expressed that parents determine much of the practices in their schools and felt that their success largely rested on parental perception. Fiona expressed that she felt a "little trial going on" with some "high profile parents" when she gave a student a grade in the 80s (rather than 90s), which she felt put her job security in danger. Christopher, whose job was lost partly due to parental influence, felt like there was not a fair investigation into the incident, with race also being a large factor for his dismissal. This reality in conjunction with lack of administrative support creates power differentials that thwart teachers' ability to act, which beckons a renewed understanding of the school model, especially in regard to school leadership.

Building on the need for a renewed understanding of the school model, I reflect on some of the limitations of elite schools this study brought to the forefront and offer further considerations for change. My findings indicate that effective leadership is incompatible with hierarchical thinking, and addressing these discrepancies has the potential to shift the inner workings of elite schools. This is not to dismiss institutional hierarchies that operate as a chain of command, but to interrogate the differences between hierarchical structures and hegemony. The former is needed, while the latter is problematic because it imposes a certain quality or status

based on a particular role in an institution or society. Reciprocity, especially in instances where certain voices are typically unheard or silenced, is needed to deconstruct hierarchical thinking and make meaningful change. The findings of this study show that educators feel they must succumb to actions and behaviours that oppose their beliefs about professional practice or their personal integrity, due to pressure from students, parents, and administration. These pressures were most prominently felt in the context of grading and assessment practices, and teachers' disciplinary practices in correcting student behaviour. Fear of disciplinary measures from parents or school leadership, as well as ensuing social consequences are a salient part of the mechanisms that enable this behaviour, which leaves little room for teachers to voice their concerns. Therefore, a re-examination of some of the power structures are required to encourage space for sharing if any change is to be made. Administrators are called to regular performance reviews by teachers and other faculty to open the space for ongoing feedback aimed at mitigating inequitable practices. In attempts to promote anonymity and garner honest feedback, this review can be facilitated by external contracted parties. As well, thinking about other power structures that exist can help to create room for dialogue among teachers, administrators, and parents. As mentioned, many elite private institutions have a board of governors that are responsible for overseeing the vision and direction of the school. It is critical to have diverse representation on the board, particularly people who are not a product of the system, such as alumni and the parent community. Including members as their way of thinking might create feedback loops that might be mitigated by including professionals who are further removed from the institution or those who can offer a more diverse perspective. Having a faculty representative to attend designated meetings might create space for teachers to share concerns or offer feedback and insight that can inform board decisions.

Furthermore, reconceptualizing the board model can be coupled with school policy and procedures that regulates relations between parent and teacher petitioning marks, or creating a code of conduct for parent-teacher communication, may reduce some of the intimidation tactics that parents use. Implementing new policies can help to establish clear expectations as well as hold individuals accountable when questionable behaviour occurs. Additionally, creating unions or teacher support groups both within and beyond the school and inclusive of other private school teachers might help to empower teachers when they feel compelled to act on questionable practices or behaviours. These groups can serve as a hub from which to obtain resources or share approaches for handling difficult moments.

This study also examined the ways in which educators are tangled in the web of privilege. They are not simply passive participants, accepting what is told, but are also co-creators through their adoption of certain beliefs. Since privileged conceptions are closely infused into one's sense of self, one of the primary methods to think about change is to create opportunities for critical self-awareness in relation to the school environment. Increased awareness does not simply mean exposure to research, although research is helpful in providing tangible information to teachers. Rather, effective detachment from limiting beliefs involves accountability by coming to know the concrete ways in which inequity takes place in the particulars of each school environment. An investigation into systemic practices is an important starting point to equity work because it can serve as a first step to understanding diverse experiences. Such an investigation would begin with a review of both the formal and informal school policy, practices, and procedures that place students as outsiders. Another essential step is to seek input from community members to better understand the experiences of minority students, such as Black students, English language learners, and other racialized groups. For example, surveys of students' experiences can shed

light on institutional gaps and instances of inequity, thereby positioning personal testimony as a powerful tool in shifting perspectives and encouraging ownership. As well, many private schools' ongoing connections to their alumni can be used to garner feedback. Alumni's perspectives can offer a robust exploration into the nature and scope of inequity due to the candor that distance from the institution allows. Such feedback can uncover the longevity of issues and the types of difficult experiences that former students may have faced. Building awareness of behaviours in need of remediation can aid in implementing new, routinized practices rooted in a commitment to equity. Schools can conduct regular audits on school practices and policies, create a centralized system for sharing data about disciplinary measures enacted, document conflict or incidents of bullying, keep statistics on student success and examine data about students who are asked to leave the school. Documentation can lead stakeholders to notice patterns to help disrupt them as the years progress. It can also create a consciousness through building habits and discussions around this powerful data.

Furthermore, institutions should offer supports to those receiving financial assistance, such as other social and emotional supports to guide students. This should also be coupled with increasing teacher awareness of possible differences in school experiences based on class differences. This is suggested given this study's finding that students on financial assistance often are othered by educators through their lack of awareness or advocacy for student needs. A review of school guidelines for working with ELLs through a framework of equity should also take place. Identification of experiences, gaps in learning, and an assessment of staff capacity are needed to better support these students. Initiatives should also be taken to improve faculty members' competencies, such a professional development facilitated by ELL specialists. If not already in place, schools should hire an equity, inclusion, and diversity position on the

administrative team. This team member would manage, review, and create educational experiences, policy, and procedures toward shifting the culture of the school.

Embodying a privileged disposition is certainly distinct from maintaining others' privilege due to existing power structures, and therefore, schools should create restorative approaches that increase awareness for the purpose of detaching educators from self-conceptions that limit others' agency in the work environment. While teachers may be well-intentioned, issues surrounding equity are not fulsomely understood because they are entangled in workplace politics, wherein some choose to rationalize silence or inequitable treatment based on the right to differences of belief – especially around the topic of queer identity in faith-based institutions. Nonetheless, this means that taking steps toward awareness and change is even more necessary. Continued education for teachers and administrators regarding workplace equity are needed to challenge existing structures, as many of these issues can easily become human rights infractions. Further, because elite private schools are self-governing, leveraging the regulatory bodies that schools already have relationships with might be a way to hold institutions accountable to this type of work. Institutions like CIS or CAIS, which require schools to participate in regular review processes to continue membership, might change their membership requirements to include demonstrable evidence of equity training in the workplace. Perhaps the Ontario College of Teachers can institute certification of workplace equity procedures. The Ministry of Education also completes curriculum inspections in private schools. Perhaps they can conduct audits based on at diversity, equity, and inclusion markers within the system.

## **7.6 Limitations of the Study**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this study sought to investigate the experiences of eight middle school and high school educators with at least one year of teaching experience in

Southern Ontario. Due to the focus and number of participants in the study, there are some restrictions of the generalizability of the study to those in a similar context. However, this study has contributed to an area that needs further investigation regarding the making of privileged self-understandings through the perspective of teachers. As well, this study delved into some experiences of privilege from an intersectional lens. Due to limits in access to educators, the participants were primarily White, middle-class educators, with one Black male educator and one non-binary teacher represented in this study's participant pool. Limitations come with not including more voices or diverse perspectives to highlight the vast array of experiences. Nonetheless, the voices of those represented in the data offer invaluable perspectives in highlighting layers of privilege in elite spaces. Some of the findings parallel broader research in the field as well.

### **7.7 Areas for Further Investigation**

In reflecting on this study's findings, it is evident that privilege tethers the self to someone else's will or notions of being. Privilege can create a separation between a person's values and their actions or create experiences that make justice and equity seem unattainable to those implicated by its workings. Research that further investigates these chasms can move elite school culture toward a future of restoration. Research is therefore needed to explore and amplify the experiences of racialized and otherwise minoritized teachers and students in the elite private system. This includes continuing to understand the experiences of Black teachers and students, and other racialized groups that this study was not able to capture. How else might other racialized groups be positioned as outsiders? Secondly, research into the experiences of ELLs requires further investigation from the perspectives of both teachers and students, especially considering that immigration is part of the fabric of Canadian society. Perhaps the making of

privileged self-understandings can be compared in both the private and public sectors with the intent to recognize its pervasiveness or possible differences according to the educational environment. Are the same problems duplicated regardless of environment? Can one system learn from the other in how ELL students' needs are addressed or ignored? Lastly, the experiences of queer teachers and students is another area that needs broadening, with a deeper exploration into the systemic practices that create these experiences given the insular nature of elite schools. It would be helpful to further explore how the administrators' beliefs influence the ways and extent to which elite communities engage with topics around gender identity and sexual orientation.

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## Appendix A

### Email Attachment for Snowball Sampling Technique

**Title:** Accessing Privilege: Teachers' Experiences in Elite Private Schools

**Researcher:** Stephanie De Santis, York University

**Brief Overview:**

This study is focused on the experiences of secondary school teachers (grades 7-12) in the private educational settings, which includes interactions in the classroom, but with equal interest in teachers' experiences outside of the classroom. This can encompass, but is not limited to, teachers' experiences with extra-curricular activities, sports, grading and assessment practices, school committees & discipline practices. It will also call upon participants to reflect on perceived benefits and disadvantages of their work environment. In hearing about teachers' experiences, this study is aimed at better understanding the complexities of the world of teaching and the numerous roles teachers play in the privileged environment of the private education system. Participation in the study would require interviews with the researcher at a time that is mutually agreeable.

The researcher of this study is Stephanie De Santis (OCT), who is also a teacher in a private school.

Please contact [desant11@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:desant11@edu.yorku.ca) if you are interested in participating or have further questions about what study participation will require.

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:** May 13th, 2021

**Study Name:** Accessing Privilege: Teachers' Experiences in Elite Private Schools

**Researcher name:** Stephanie De Santis, Doctor of Philosophy in Education, Faculty of Education at York University, Principal Investigator. (desant11@yorku.ca)

**Purpose of the Research:** This study is focused on teachers' experiences in the private education system, which includes interactions in the classroom, but with equal interest in teachers' experiences outside of the classroom. This can encompass, but is not limited to, teachers' experiences with sports, extra-curricular activities, grading and assessment practices, school committees & discipline practices. It will also call upon participants to reflect on perceived benefits and disadvantages of their work environment. In hearing about teachers' experiences, this study is aimed at better understanding the numerous roles teachers play in the privileged environments of private educational settings. A preliminary questionnaire will be given to participants, followed by a total of 3 interviews that will be 75-90 minutes in length. The results presented will be in the form of a doctoral dissertation, which will be in presented in written form, as well as defended orally. The results from the dissertation may also appear in other academic presentations, papers or articles.

#### **What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

This study will run from May through September 2021.

#### ***Consent and Pre-Interview Questionnaire (15 Minutes) [May/June]***

During the first phase of the study, you will be asked to return this consent form. If you consent to participate, you will be sent a pre-interview questionnaire asking you questions concerning demographics and your employment history.

#### ***Interview One (75-90 Minutes) [June/July]***

Once a mutually agreeable time has been set between you and the researcher, a Zoom invitation will be sent to partake in the first interview. In this interview, you will be asked to share some background information about your work environment(s) and work experiences.

#### ***Interview Two (75-90 Minutes) [July/August]***

Interview two will be scheduled upon completion of the first. Once a mutually agreeable time has been set between you and the researcher, a Zoom invitation will be sent to partake in the second interview. In this interview, you will be asked to share some of your perceived advantages and disadvantages in your environment by reflecting on your various roles and experiences in the private school setting. This might be areas of opportunity or possible experiences of conflict.

#### ***Interview Three (75-90 Minutes) [August/September]***

Interview three will be scheduled upon completion of the second. Once a mutually agreeable time has been set between you and the researcher, a Zoom invitation will be sent to partake in the final interview. In this interview, you will be asked to reflect on some of the key themes from both interviews one and two that centre around your shared experiences of working in the privileged environment of the school setting. This interview is an opportunity to engage in critical self-reflection of your practices as a teacher.

#### **Risks and Discomforts:**

The risks in this study are minimal. However, in asking you to share your work experiences, we recognize that not all memories or experiences in the work environment will be remembered in a positive light. Should you experience discomfort talking about a memory or experience, you have the right at any point to discontinue talking about the

topic or may refuse to answer a question all together, with no consequences to the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** The process of reflection is mutually beneficial for the participant and the researcher. It not only contributes to the understanding of teacher's work, but it also provides participants the opportunity to be self-reflective in teaching practices and relationships in the school.

**Confidentiality:** All information you provide during the research will be held in confidence. This includes questionnaire data, recordings of zoom interviews, or other material provided by you during the interview process. Your data will be safely stored on a password protected laptop before being transferred to a secure server, and only the principal investigator will have access to this information. Research data will be deleted by September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

**Online Survey Hosts:** The researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey, Survey Monkey, may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus *the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.*

**Audio/Video Conferencing Software:** This study will use the Zoom Platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact the researcher for further information.

Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to research team members' local computer, not the cloud-based service.

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting /data collection session.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Stephanie De Santis at [desant11@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:desant11@edu.yorku.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Sarah Barrett at [sbarrett@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:sbarrett@edu.yorku.ca). You may also contact the Graduate Program in the Faculty of Education at [gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca) and/or 416-736 5018.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York

University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in *Accessing Privilege: Teachers' Experiences in Elite Private Schools* conducted by Stephanie De Santis. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature**

Participant

**Date**

**Signature**

Principal Investigator

**Date**

**Additional consent (where applicable)**

**1. Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

**2. Video recording or use of photographs**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to the use of images of me (including photographs, video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In print, digital and slide form	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In academic presentations	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In media	[ ] Yes	[ ] No
In thesis materials	[ ] Yes	[ ] No

**Signature:**

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant: (name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Signature:**

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant: (name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire: Microsoft Forms

*Background Information:*

1. Please indicate your name, age, gender, race & social class.

*Relationship to private schools in non-teaching capacity:*

2. Did you attend any private schools as a student? If so, what school did you attend and for what grades?
3. Does an immediate family member currently attend or has previously attended a private school? If so, what school do/did they attend and for what grades?
4. Does an immediate family member or spouse work in a private school?
5. If applicable, answer the following: Do you currently send or have you sent your children to a private school in the past? If so, what school and what are the reason(s) for this choice?

*Employment History*

1. In chronological order, please list the schools you have taught at and include the years you worked at the school, the subjects taught and any other roles or responsibilities you have/had.

School	# of years at school	Subjects/ Grades taught / other roles/responsibilities

*Other*

6. Is there a preferred day of the week and/or time to schedule interviews? Please indicate below:
7. Is there a specific day/time to be avoided when scheduling interviews? Please indicate below:
8. Is there any other information you feel the researcher should be aware of before beginning the interview process?

## Appendix D

### Interview 1: Contextual Questions about School Environment

1. How did you come to work at (school name)? What are some of your reasons for your continued work at (school name)? What are some of the reasons you left (school name)?
2. What are/were some of the benefits of working at (school name(s))? What are some of the challenges?
3. How would you describe the culture and leadership model of the school?
4. How would you describe teachers' role within your school?
5. What are/were some important expectations for teachers at (school name)?
6. How would you describe discipline practices in the school?
7. What is the mission/vision of your school? What does this mean for you in terms of your own teaching practices?
8. What are some of the ways you help students to prepare and plan for their future both inside and outside the classroom?
9. Have you witnessed any unfair treatment in the school environment? What was the nature of it? How did you feel about it?
10. How would you describe the school's response to COVID-19? How do you feel about their approach? How has this been received by the school community?

## Appendix E

### Interview Two: Questions focused on Teachers' Experiences

#### General

1. How would you define privilege?
  - a. Have you witnessed privilege in your school? If so, can you share an example.
2. How would you define entitlement?
  - a. Have you witnessed entitlement in the school? If so, can you share an example?

#### Parents-Teacher relationships

1. How would you describe the relationship between parents and teachers in the school?
  - a. Can you share a time when you have felt supported by parents? Can you share an experience where you have felt challenged or uncomfortable during an interaction with a parent?

#### Administrative Relationships

1. How would you describe the role administration plays in the school? Tell me about some ways you are held accountable as teachers?
2. Tell me about a time you may have disagreed with administration's approach when it came to handling discipline, school policy, or an important decision in the school community.

#### Extra-curriculars

1. What are some of your experiences with extra-curricular commitments and/or school committees?

#### Assessment

1. How are grades and assessment practices talked about in your school both formally and informally? Can you tell me a time your practices have been questioned?
2. Have you changed a student's mark after grading it? How often does this happen and for what reasons?

#### Social Media/Marketing

1. Can you describe some examples of how you have been involved with social media and/or marketing while at school? How do you feel about these interactions?

#### Identity

1. Are there certain groups in the school community that are favoured over others?
2. Are there certain identities as educators that are favoured over others?
3. Are there any aspects of your identity that you show less of at work?

## Appendix F

### Interview Three: Follow-up Questions

1. In interview 1 and/or 2, you discussed \_\_\_\_\_. Can you elaborate on and/or clarify what you meant when you said “\_\_\_\_\_”? (Insert quote of participants).
2. Reflecting on your experiences with \_\_\_\_\_ (insert themes from interview 1 and/or 2), how has your understanding of your working environment changed?
3. What new insights about the advantages of private schools came to light as a result of this interview process? What have you come to understand about your role you have to play in this process?
4. What are some ways you have participated in the benefits of privilege? How have you found meaningful ways to challenge it?
5. What advice would you give to newly hired teacher to your school?