

PATHOLOGIES AND COMPLICITIES: HIGH SCHOOL AND THE IDENTITIES OF
DISAFFECTED SOUTH ASIAN “BROWN BOYS”

by

ANISH SAYANI

B.Sc., The University of British Columbia, 1985
M.Ed., The University of British Columbia, 2002

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ABSTRACT

This study is a response to a growing disquietude in many schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia that there is “something wrong” with South Asian boys. During the past twenty years, approximately 100 South Asian young men have been killed as a result of criminal violence (Ministry Report, 2006), with these murder numbers steadily increasing each month. Reports from think-tanks and informal conversations and surveys with teachers and administrators in schools with high populations of South Asian students all support disturbing levels of academic failure and disaffection. Since there are no reliable data or very few published studies about the school experiences and achievement of South Asian students, educators do not understand the magnitude of this problem.

Hence, using a three-dimensional narrative methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this study, investigated how the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students may exacerbate or alleviate the problem of disaffection. Specifically, it sought to understand South Asian male students' school experiences (including experiences of inclusion, marginalization, disaffection, success, and failure); and how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students.

Eight months of ethnographic fieldwork at a mid-size secondary school in a Vancouver suburb and sixty-one interviews conducted with students, educators, and educational leaders generated several key findings. The study showed that the educators and educational leaders at this school pathologized the lived experiences of the “Brown boys”; engaged in deficit theorizing discourses and practices; failed to mobilize the

identities of the “Brown boys” in the classrooms; and excluded the “Brown boys” and community members from authorizing their perspectives to inform disciplinary and other school practice-shaping decisions. This study also showed that the Brown boys were complicit in the pathologizing of their own identities, which among other detrimental effects, exacerbated their disaffection at school. Through narratives and first hand voices of the participants, this study attempts to provide all educators and educational leaders new ways to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students and possibly even to mitigate the schooling factors that may exacerbate the disaffection of all minoritized students.

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Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to aery thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet, when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

A Valediction Forbidding Mourning
By: John Donne

You have been before this life, are in this life, and will continue being after this life, the two arms of my compass.

To Noorjean: your virtues of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of heart and mind, your fortitude in friendship, and your humility and magnanimity in which you live your life have brought light and laughter in my life.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife and inamorata, Noorjean Hassam.

You are indeed for me, the meaning of your name: the light of life.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing disquietude in many schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia that there is “something wrong” with South Asian boys. More and more educators are providing anecdotal information based on personal experiences, action-research projects, and teacher education courses to confirm there is a problem. “Indo-Canadian” radio call-in shows,¹ magazines (Mehfil, 2003) and community newspapers (Voice, 2003; Link 2001) are using the terms “travesty,” “disturbing” and “lost-generation” to describe these trajectories of academic failure. Informal surveys at schools and Gurdwaras (Olek, 2003), reports from think-tanks (Research Advisory Committee, 2003, Indo-Canadian Forum, 2002), and informal conversations with teachers and administrators in schools with high populations of South Asian students in the Lower Mainland² all support disturbing levels of academic failure and disaffection.

One high school teacher of ten years, who positions himself as “South Asian” painfully complained, “Our boys are in trouble. You know, I would even say, for many, it is serious trouble. I don’t think they [South Asian boys] see it. Many teachers see it and either ignore it or don’t care but they also know these boys are screwing up” (Singh, P. personal communication, January 13, 2004). Another teacher (Olek, S. personal communication, June 15, 2005) recently reported that during a professional development day in her high school, a teacher colleague asked, “What are we going to do about the ‘Brown’ problem?” She responded that she thought it might be the “school problem”

¹ Red 93.1FM

² To help me decide the subject and focus of my doctoral research, I conducted, from January 17, 2003 to June 26, 2003, seven informal interviews and two phone conversations with educators and educational leaders in six of the Vancouver Lower Mainland Schools with high populations of South Asian students. Two major themes that surfaced from all seven conversations and interviews were: (1) The disaffection of South Asian male students and (2) The academic struggles experienced by South Asian male students.

given that she had learned during a mini-research project completed for her Masters programme that the large majority of “Brown” male students had ranked in the lowest fifth of the graduating class of 257, with an average GPA of 1.65 compared to the whole class average of 2.42. An experienced principal (Randhawa, R. personal communication, April 5, 2003) in a large high school in the Lower Mainland whom I interviewed informally stated, “There is no understanding of the Indo-Canadian community” by most of his colleagues and staff members and although most of them accept that there is an increscent problem, very few are showing an interest in learning more. An experienced educator and education leader of fifteen years (Hirji, S. personal communication, April 24, 2003), whom I informally interviewed before the beginning of my formal doctoral research mentioned that if there aren’t any

thoughtful interventions forthcoming, the problem with the ‘Indo-Canadian’ boys in my school district will get even grimmer. Right now, I seriously don’t think we, as a collection of schools in our district, are adequately meeting their [Indo-Canadian boys] needs.

A task force commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage (2006) entitled *Multiculturalism—Group of 10: Community Response to South Asian Youth Violence* declared: “Anecdotal evidence suggests that many South Asian children fall behind expected learning levels at early ages in terms of numeracy skills and literacy, and that many youth who engage in violence experienced academic difficulties in school” (p. 3-4).

These comments notwithstanding, educators do not understand the problem. There are no reliable data about the school experiences and achievement of South Asian students and an exceedingly small number of published research studies. In fact, in comparison to the United States, Canadian data on any minority status and academic

achievement are absent (Cummins, 1997). This, in part, is because standardized tests are not pervasive in Canadian schools as they are in the US and hence specific outcome indicators reflecting student academic achievements are generally unavailable (Cummins, 1997). The other reason is that the minimal data that are available (eg., Foundation Skills Assessment and Provincial exam results) are not disaggregated in categories other than gender, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, and special education and non-special education.

Clearly, to understand the nature and dimensions of the disaffection of South Asian male students, a study is required. Without understanding the nature and dimensions of this problem, we not only risk further disaffection of these students, but we remain blind to educational policies, principles, and/or practices that may be causing, contributing to, or alleviating this disaffection. To tarry in nescience has far-reaching implications and consequences not only for South Asian male students but, I submit, for all students and for society at large. After all, at the heart of good education is social justice for all (Connell, 1993; Shields, 2003a, 2003b; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Vincent, 2003). If some in an educational system purported to benefit all are disadvantaged, questions of all types and sizes must be asked. Failure to do so leads to a corrupt education for all and a crisis in democracy (Greene, 1999; Shields, 2008).

Connell (1993) is concise:

The moral quality of education is inevitably affected by the moral character of educational institutions. If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. The equality of education for all others is degraded. ... An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social economic advantage. (p.2)

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this narrative study is, therefore, to investigate how the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students may exacerbate or alleviate the problem of disaffection. The specific research objectives are:

1. To understand South Asian students' school experiences (including experiences of inclusion, marginalization, disaffection, success, and failure); and
2. To understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students.

Based on the findings derived from answering these two questions, it is my hope to offer new meanings and insights to educators and educational leaders to understand the schooling experiences of these disaffected South Asian male students. Even though “the contribution of a narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 42), it is my deepest hope that these “new sense of meanings and significance” borne from this study do yield recommendations that help educators and educational leaders to mitigate the schooling factors that may exacerbate the disaffection of these South Asian male students, specifically and disaffected minoritized students, generally.

An Overview of the Theoretical and Literary Lenses

This inquiry is grounded in a wide array of personal body experiences—autobiographical experiences—in education and vast bodies of literature about education (Segall, 1999). After situating myself later in this introductory chapter, I weave in many of my relevant experiences throughout the text of this study. Personal experiences, according to post-positivist realist theorists such as Alcoff (2000), Alcoff and Mohanty

(2006), Mohanty (2000), Moya (2000, 2006), Hames-Garcia (2000) and others, are theoretically mediated and form a "cognitive component through which we can gain access to knowledge of the world" (Moya, 2000; p. 81). By including my personal experiences throughout this inquiry, I imbricate the epistemic status of my experiences with the authoritative knowledge of the wider community of learners in the specific field of education I have selected. That wider field of education, for this inquiry, includes: post-postmodern and positivist realist theories of identity, critical multiculturalism, transformative leadership, and Bakhtin's dialogical concept of polyphony. The first three I examine, in detail, in Chapter 2; polyphony, I explore below. Before I do, however, I must clarify, briefly, the larger concept of *dialogue* that contextualizes Bakhtin's notion of polyphony.

Bakhtin (1984), a philosopher of language, literary theorist, and neologist advances arguably the most formative work on dialogue. The following quote provides a quick précis of how Bakhtin (1984) views dialogic relations:

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*) ... The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. To be means to *communicate* ... To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary: looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another* ... I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance). [Emphasis in original] (p. 287)

For Bakhtin, dialogue is not only an instrument of communication, a conversation, or a medium to achieve a goal; it is, like relationships, (Buber, 1970; Bakhtin, 1984; Sidorkin, 1999, 2002; Thayer-Bacon, 2003; Taylor, 1994; Wheatley, 1992, 1996) the very essence

of being. It is a person's *raison d'être*. It is an orientation and desire to understand and be understood through the presence of and participation with the other. Bakhtin argues, to fully exist, one must live in the dialogical.

Dialogue is not an instrumental approach or strategy for communication, but communication itself (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Unlike Saussure and other structuralists, Bakhtin posits that dialogue is more than a static triad of sender, message, and receiver. The message, for Bakhtin, is fluid and evolving, formulated and formulating as a result of what the speaker has already uttered, what he or she will utter, and the *anticipation* of what the speaker will or will not utter. Each message is uttered in a context, which has in its memory the dialogue partners themselves, the formulations and intentions of previous utterances, and possible future utterances which will contribute to the dialogue. There are multiple messages or viewpoints vying for understanding in a dialogue. This leads to Bakhtin's concept of *polyphony*.

Bakhtin, in explicating the literary work of Dostoevsky, describes polyphony (a concept appropriated from music) as a dialogic exchange of multiple voices that replaces the singularity of monologism by allowing disparate and conflicting voices to compete with one another. In Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, all characters have an equal say; the author, who moderates between the voices of these characters and usually has the final word in more common homophonic novels, does not wield this power in a polyphonic novel. All the voices, including that of the author, are engaged in a dialogue; no one voice is privileged. The author does not take an omniscient point of view and does not preside as a higher authority. In fact, the author stands alongside the other characters, abdicating her "surplus of vision" (Danow, 1991). That is, the author surrenders her

prescient knowledge of the novel's characters and their life trajectories and instead participates in an ongoing dialogue as an equal. In Bakhtin's (1984) own words,

In his work a hero appears whose voice is constructed exactly like the voice of the author himself in a novel of the usual type. A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters. (p.7)

This authorial position is "a fully realizable and thoroughly consistent dialogic position" (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 63), one in which the author has a dialogue *with*, not about, a character. The characters, in turn, engage in this to and fro not as objects of the author's consciousness but as "*free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" [italics in original] (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 6). Clearly, the character with respect to the author, in Buberian terminology, is not an *it* but a full and voluble *Thou* (Buber, 1970). So for Bakhtin, when one is engaged in a *Thou* dialogue, fully available to the speaker, to what he or she has uttered and to what he or she will utter, one becomes part of "a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 6).

Bakhtin's concept of polyphony truly deepens not only our understanding of dialogue, in general, but how dialogical relations should occur in schools. It not only buttresses our understanding that meanings in dialogue are co-authored but more importantly, it makes apparent that meanings occur at "an intersection of two consciousnesses" (p. 289). That is, meanings are created in dialogue on the edges and

borders where two or more consciousnesses meet. Danow (1991) adroitly advances this thought:

Meanings as Truth may thus be said to belong to neither the self nor the other but inheres within an ideal third category, in which the word and intention of each are intermeshed but transcended. 'From the point of view of truth, there are no individual consciousnesses,' writes Bakhtin, suggesting that someone's earlier fragmented 'truth'—as well as the disintegrative self—are potentially made whole, if only fleetingly, by the interaction of several viewpoints (p.65).

In other words, meaning or interpretative "truth" does not belong to anyone; rather it is a social construction born of dialogue and context with explicit material consequences. No one person is bequeathed with the truth; no one person can ever see the entire picture or understand the totality of any situation. No single voice has the scope or sweep to beget the truth (Bakhtin, 1984). It is only when individuals share their perspectives; engage deeply, respectfully, and resolutely to understand each other; and invite the other to enter into their worldviews that shape their perspectives, that meanings become relevant, inclusive, and wholly understood. It is, therefore, precisely in difference that a polyphonic dialogue can bring about a commonality of understanding. In that understanding, however, there must exist the potential for misunderstanding. In that understanding, there must exist the potential for controversy and dissonance. In that understanding, there must exist the potential for difference. Understanding, therefore, does not mean a single way of seeing or a unified viewpoint. It does not mean that everyone agrees and shares a similar perspective. Understanding harbours, in its composition, the possibility of incongruity. In fact, according to Bakhtin, "to understand something means to embrace two or more incongruous views on the subject" (quoted in Sidorkin 2002; p. 168). Therefore, as we have seen, genuine understanding, which is

robust enough to contain a surfeit of meanings and perspectives, is constructed at the intersections where many voices are engaged in a polyphonic dialogue.

In the process of polyphony, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and miscommunication may occur; however, these setbacks must not hinder the "bigger" purposes of dialogue and understanding. What must occur is the inclusion of all possible voices. Different interpretations and perspectives drive the dialogue. As Sidorkin (2002) declares, "No existing statement is refused to enter the big dialogue or the polyphonic truth ... any concept of truth implies both existence and exclusion of false statements" (p. 169). Hence, even if some voices are interpreted as disturbing, ignorant, or hopeless, they must have the space to be heard. Only in this "deep" diversity—where difference speaks in all her voices—can we begin to expand understanding. Bakhtin (1984) is sublime:

The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded. One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event. (p. 21)

Of salience then is that in polyphony, when all voices have the freedom to engage in dialogue in all their candour, a "deep" understanding emerges that far exceeds any form of individual understanding. That is, when a group of voices interact in an intense dialogue of *I* and *Thou*, the resulting understanding of each voice eclipses any form of understanding arrived at individually. The understanding that issues from polyphony is rich in perspectives. It is an estuary thick with diverse viewpoints and context. Sidorkin (2002) is explicit in his explanation:

If one wants to know the truth about something, one should attempt to solicit everything everyone has to say about it, make all these voices talk

to each other, and include one's own voice as one among equals. One should listen to this big dialogue, not to get the main idea but only to get all the voices to address each other ... Everyone can probably remember such a high-intensity conversation when all the opposing positions present themselves as distinct and yet really address each other. At a certain point, one notices that in order to really talk, the voices should implicitly include each other, echo each other, so that the difference 'travels down into depths,' ultimately splitting every individual voice. And just before it falls apart again, the truth emerges as in musical polyphony, where the multitude of voices forms a higher of harmony. (p.170)

In no way, however, is this "deeper" and more robust understanding complete. Instead, the new understanding becomes a new starting point for further polyphonic dialogue. As mentioned earlier, polyphonic dialogue is a result of what the speaker has already uttered, what he or she will utter, and the *anticipation* of what the speaker will or will not utter.

I feature the ontological nature of polyphonic dialogue here and not in Chapter 2 because I want to underline the centrality of dialogue throughout this study. Taylor (1994) claims that "we define our identity always in dialogue" (p. 32-33); similarly, the identities that I attempt to represent in this study have also been borne in polyphonic dialogue. Indeed, dialogue may not have a specific method or perhaps all methods may work, but when dialogue occurs, it does so because of the ethos of openness, authenticity, and respect that the participants are willing to commit to each other. As a researcher, this is the ethos I attempted to create with all my participants. Although all my interviews were guided by an interview protocol, I did not use it in a systematic and rigid manner, but in a way that allowed my participants to share their experiences on their own terms. They decided what to share, how much to share, and when to share it. Invoking Bakhtin (1986), the "message" in our dialogue was fluid and evolving, formulated and formulating as a result of what I had said, what my participant had said, and the anticipation of what we both would or would not say. Through our dialogue, we

attempted to co-author meanings that did not belong to me or my participant but resided in a third space that we had both created (Bhabha, 1995; Danow, 1991). I will elaborate on this point and even discuss the successes and challenges I experienced with this process in Chapter 3.

Overview of the Method

I conducted an eight month narrative inquiry of a grade eleven social studies class in a Canadian high school—Montclair High School³—with a large population of South Asian students, which allowed for an in-depth investigation of how the schooling experiences of South Asian male students helped exacerbate or alleviate the problem of their disaffection. The field notes, field texts, and research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which—after multiple interpretations, re-interpretations, constructions, and re-constructions—I eventually fashioned into this dissertation, were composed from: (1) eight months of classroom observations—two to three times a week; (2) eight months of school social observation during lunchtime and afterschool—at least once a week; (3) semi-structured interviews with forty-five grade eleven and twelve students—each interview ranging from forty-five minutes to an hour and half in length; and (4) semi-structured interviews with twelve classroom teachers, and four school and teacher leaders—each interview ranging from one and half hours to three hours in length. Although I will elaborate on the details of the narrative inquiry in Chapter 3, I must state briefly that even though this dissertation attempts to best represent the participants’ storied lives in storied ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this rendition is only one of many possible “stories.” My relationship to and interpretation of the participants’ stories, behaviours, and actions fundamentally influence and are influenced by the

³ Pseudonym

epistemological status and nature of this text. What is revealed in this inquiry, how it is revealed, as well as the meaning of what is revealed, is shaped by my relationship and interpretation of the participants.

Self Positioning

I have been an educator for twenty-five years: fourteen years at three different high schools teaching English, humanities, and social studies both in British Columbia and Texas; three years as a staff developer in Utah working with teachers in a school comprising 99% Navajo students; four years as an instructor teaching various teacher education courses at the University of British Columbia; and twenty-five years teaching, leading, designing, and training religious education in the Shia Ismaili Muslim community. I state this not as a résumé but as a declaration that teaching is who I am, not what I do (Palmer, 1998; Duncan-Andrade, 2007). “Good teaching,” writes Palmer (1998), “comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). My identity and integrity as a teacher informs this inquiry; they ensure that this inquiry reflects the complex web of connections that generate for all students a world of meaning, possibility, and hope. My teacher practitioner voice, as will become evident throughout this inquiry, will appeal for acts of teaching that are always emancipatory (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992a, 1992b), transformative (Dantley, 2003, 2005; Shields, 2008, 2009), and socially just (Brown, 2004; Greene, 1988; Murtadha-Watts, 1999). Borrowing an idea from Jardine (1998), who in turn borrows from Wittgenstein, I can draw a boundary around my teaching, but I cannot *give* it a boundary that could prevent it from entwining with my life and the lives of those with whom I live. I can draw a boundary around my

teaching voice but I cannot give it a boundary that will prevent it from intertwining with the other voices in this inquiry.

“Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 121). This is a critical point. I am also a Brown South Asian male. Born in Uganda, I arrived in Canada as a refugee when I was ten years old. For the subsequent several years, experiences of poverty, racism, and marginalization forged the lenses through which I still see life. What seeds hope in my everyday life, however, are my belief in dialogue and my ardent belief that what is eternal in people is their soul. This is why I am an educator.

Definitions

In this dissertation, I frequently employ the terms *minoritized* and *South Asian*. Below, I examine the meanings these terms represent, the slippage associated with these meanings, and provide a context to these terms.

Minoritized

For four years, I have taught a pre-service teacher education course that examines issues of social justice in education. Much of our class dialogue, critique, and reflection engage with the compelling themes of racism, marginalization, sexism, hegemony, and multicultural education. Invariably, at least once in almost all the fourteen classes I have taught the issue of "reverse-racism" boils to the surface, usually after a heated critical analysis of "Whiteness." The argument usually unfolds as follows: "Look, my school is almost ninety percent 'Indo-Canadian.' My school tries very hard to cater to *their* needs but it never seems to be enough. In fact, it is the 'White' students and sometimes the 'White' teachers who are disrespected. We are never heard and many times purposely

ignored.” In the San Juan school district of Utah, where I was an educational consultant for three years, American Indian students are educated in public schools, which are mandated and operated by the State Office of Education. "This arrangement" according to Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi (2005), "brings Native children into schools where they are often numerically in the majority, despite the frequent predominance of hegemonic norms and values of the traditional white American society and of Caucasian policy makers" (p. 59). Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi (2005) employ the term *minoritized* instead of *minority* to describe this phenomena where despite being the majority by numbers, these groups are marginalized by societal, economic, and institutional power blocs that operate systems of practices that ensures the maintenance of their own social order. They clarify, "the term ... minoritized stress[es] the importance of institutional and societal power structures that have marginalized a group that by virtue of sheer numbers alone (some could argue) should have the dominant, legitimate, decision-making voice" (p. 59). So, even though Canadians from a South Asian heritage form the population majority in some schools in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver or the Navajo form the population majority in some schools in the San Juan school district, they are still minoritized by the preponderance of institutionalized and cultural norms, values, and practices of "White" North Americans. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term minoritized to make explicit the all-encompassing yet "invisible" influences of hegemony in societal power relations.

South Asian

The category of *South Asian*, too, must be problematized. The representation of minoritized identities in essentialist terms has arguably been one of multicultural

education's greatest failings, which I will elaborate on, in detail, in Chapter 3. Briefly, there is a tendency for a dominant group to ascribe characteristics of identity onto a minoritized group claiming that these attributes best represent and describe all the people in that group (Hall, 1997b; Moya, 2000; Woodward, 1997). It can be even more severe than this: Groups can be seen to have an immutable and definite "essence" that characterizes their innate nature. Through the processes of signification and power, markers—that are usually derogatory—are affixed to a group of people that eventually become the defining features of that group.

In contemporary educational and journalist parlance, the term “South Asian” collectively refers to individuals from the Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu communities. However, individuals who do not belong to one of these faith based groups, but who directly or indirectly trace their lineage from the Indian subcontinent can also position or be positioned the category of South Asian. For example, in the 2006 Canada census (Statistics Canada, 2006a), thirteen classifications⁴ were offered to respondents to assess whether or not they wanted to classify themselves as South Asian. If respondents could not “fit into” choices of countries such as Pakistan or Sri Lanka or in one of the listed States of India, they could either place themselves into the general category of “East Indian” or “South Asian (NIE)” (NIE: not included elsewhere). Another example: According to the Transcripts and Examinations (Edudata Canada, 2009), there are over twenty-two home languages self-reported by students who are positioned, in their records, as South Asian. Whether or not these students would position themselves as South Asian is debatable.

⁴ Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Nepali, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil and South Asian (not included elsewhere).

Indeed, the criteria to position oneself or be positioned as South Asian are ambiguous and indeterminate. There are a wide array of reasons why subjects are recruited—or interpellated—into subject-positions or why individuals affix categories such as South Asian onto themselves. Let me clarify and explain this point by examining briefly a few of these criteria. First, a shared language is commonly used as a social locator to identify, mark, or determine the identity of a group. Accordingly, from the classifications offered by Census Canada, individuals who identify themselves as Goan and who speak *Konkani*, an Indo-Aryan language or the tourist-friendly language of *Hindi*, could appropriately position themselves or be positioned the category of South Asian. Similarly, individuals from Nepal who speak *Nepali*, a derivative of *Sanskrit* could also, according to Census Canada, appropriately position themselves or be positioned the category of South Asian. Hence, a Goan and a Nepali, living in Canada, speaking different languages can both be marked as South Asian. Following this further, one cannot assume, then, that a student in one of our schools, who speaks *Nepali* at home, shares a common South Asian identity with another student who speaks *Konkani* at home. What would it mean to them, as students, and to us, as educators, to say that their identity is South Asian? Would our perceptions—or for that matter, their perceptions—change if both of these students spoke the common language of *Hindi* that is pervasive in South East Asia?

Second, skin color is also commonly used as an identity marker (Bannerji, 2000; Gilroy, 1997; Jiwani, 2006; Moya, 2000). In Chapter 6, I will elaborate on the politics of skin color and how “the skin is written upon with colonial discourse—which is orientalist and racist” (Jiwani, 2006; p. 13). For now, however, I acknowledge that the discourse of

skin color is complicated, circuitous, and contradictory. Nevertheless, in day-to-day life, the skin-color of an individual is usually used—un-problematically—as one of the main criteria to position her identity. Someone who is “White,” by default, can probably trace her lineage and heritage to somewhere in Europe. Someone who is “Black,” by default, can probably trace her lineage and heritage to Africa. Someone who is “Brown,” by default, can probably trace her lineage and heritage to somewhere in Asia. This assumption of skin color, of course, is deeply problematic and, frankly, absurd. However, this crass classification system is a common informal practice in our schools, which of course begs further scrutiny. So, what does the identity of “South Asian” mean for a second generation “light” Brown-skinned Canadian student who speaks only English or French and whose grandparents were born in Gujarat? This student would share few, if any, common features of a “South Asian” identity with a fellow “dark” Brown skinned classmate who is a recent immigrant from Mumbai and who can barely speak any English or French. In turn, it is unlikely that either of these two students would share any common features of a “South Asian” identity with a fellow “White” skinned Canadian classmate who was born in Karachi to one “White” skinned parent with a long lineage and heritage from Germany and to another “Brown” skinned parent with a long lineage and heritage from Pakistan. What does “South Asian” mean in just these three different contexts?

Religion is also another social locator to position the identities of individuals (Moya, 2000; Hopkins, et al., 2002; Jiwani, 2006; Woodward, 1997). This is particularly true of the post-9/11 era (Jackson, 2007; Modood, 2003) and 7/7 (Fleras, 2009) in London where religious identity has become one of the dominant technologies for the

production and maintenance of nationalism (Grewal, 2003). How then does religion—especially one that is demonized by the dominant culture—help shape the perceptions of an already marginalized group? What then does “South Asian” mean to a Roman Catholic student born in India’s most Easternmost state of Arunachal Pradesh living in the Suburbs of Vancouver? How would her experiences of being “South Asian” compare to a British Columbian born Muslim student whose parents were born in Pakistan? What is “South Asian” about them? Clearly, the different variations and possibilities of what it means to be “South Asian” are endless. I have only briefly examined three social locators that when intersecting can yield an indeterminate number of identity combinations. Introducing the locators of gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, abilities, and the like, to this equation only multiplies, *ad infinitum*, the possibilities of identity locations.

The point I am attempting to develop is simple: Student identities are complex, multiple, contradictory, and fluid. Any study focusing on a group of individuals collectively represented under one general category must escape the essentializing notions that have altogether plagued minoritized students. Student identities must be seen differently. As I will explain in Chapter 2, students' personal experiences, according to post positivist realist theory of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006) are socially, theoretically, and materially constructed. These experiences are theoretically mediated in many different ways so that a student, even though she belongs to a similar cultural or faith-based group, or may share a similar social location, does not necessarily share similar or the same experiences as others from her group or social location. So, for example, even though a Sikh student who may share some core values and similar

lifestyles as other Sikh students, her experiences may be entirely different because her meaning-making system that allows her to interpret specific experiences are particular to her history, context, and ability.

Limitations and Delimitations

This inquiry, as a qualitative study, shares the similar generalizability constraints. That is, one cannot draw descriptive or inferential conclusions from the South Asian male students in this inquiry and generalize them to all South Asian male students in all schools in all of North America. However, the inquiry does claim to represent the “participant signature” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 148) or the faithfulness of character and identity of the participants. The inquiry is not about speaking on behalf of all South Asian students and asking “have I got this right?”(p. 148). Instead, it is about representing the consistent and contradictory, complex, and inner stories about the participants’ lived and relived experiences (Ely, 2007) that begs the question: “Is this you? Do you see yourself here? Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 148). From the feedback I received from that majority of the participants, the answer was a resounding “yes.”

The “reading” of this inquiry is not only constructed, but it is done so in a specific constructing position. As such, there is no one way for inquirers to conduct their “reading.” Different theoretical constructs, lenses, and perspectives offer different interpretations and accounts of the same experience (Hammersley, 1992). Although I extensively examine my theoretical frameworks in Chapter 2, I must state explicitly here that the identity construct I employ in this inquiry is sociological in nature and not psychological.

There are a number of schools in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver with high South Asian student populations; this fact, coupled with my limitations of time and financial resources, made it necessary for me to delimit my inquiry to one school. I have also chosen to delimit my inquiry to focus on South Asian male students only but include the voices of others (South Asian and non-South Asian females; non-South Asian males; South Asian and non-South Asian female teachers and leaders; and South Asian and non-South Asian male teachers and leaders) in an effort to better understand how the South Asian male students are positioned and how they position themselves in relation to others. Lastly, I have also chosen to delimit my inquiry by choosing not to identify or explore the religious affiliation of the South Asian male students. I understand, clearly, that identities develop from the intermingling of many markers of difference or social locations, which in turn influence a person's life experiences (Bhabha, 1996; Hall, 1990, 1997; Kelly, 2003; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000; Woodward, 1997; Young, 1995). However, social locations such as religion are also used to pathologize the lived experiences of individuals; this is particularly true for South Asian males in Canada, which I will examine in greater detail in Chapter 4. In no way do I want to contribute to this pathologizing discourse and, in particular, intimate—explicitly or implicitly—that a certain cross-section of the South Asian male students who are experiencing difficulties or allegedly causing difficulties for others in schools, belong to a specific religious community. The intent of this inquiry is not to search for any links—should there, in fact, even be any links—between South Asian male students' religious affiliation and the degree of disaffection they experience at school.

Significance

The study is important for four key reasons. First, this study will begin to address the gaps that currently exist about the school experiences and achievement of South Asian students. It will provide educators and educational leaders with a better understanding of the schooling factors that both exacerbate and mitigate the problem of disaffection currently beleaguering the South Asian males, specifically, and other minoritized students, generally.

Second, it will provide educators and educational leaders with a general profile (not, however, an essentialist identity construct) of South Asian male students who are currently experiencing disaffection. It will also attempt to describe some of the characteristics of this disaffection to assist educators and educational leaders to better understand the nature and sources of this disaffection. With a fuller understanding of the sources and factors that are contributing to this disaffection, educators and educational leaders can better work with their South Asian male students to devise effective ways—at the personal, relational, and institutional levels—to mitigate their disaffection.

Third, this study will attempt to describe how educators and educational leaders see, understand, and relate to their South Asian male students. It will explore how they position the identities of these students vis-à-vis the identities of students from the dominant society and other minoritized groups. Should new and more supportive ways of relating to the South Asian students be required, they can begin to make the necessary changes.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, this study, in a small way, will help to mitigate the disaffection of the South Asian male students so that they, too, can “develop

their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society” (BC Ministry of Education, 2008; p. 4).

Layout of the Dissertation

This dissertation is a story of identity, teaching and leading, and story. Within this story are little stories of South Asian boys, essentialization, pathologization, criminalization, entitlement, complicity, and angst. It is a story of hope too; for without hope, there would be no reason to tell this or any story. To tell this story with integrity and amplitude, I have to speak from three voices: narrative inquirer; storyteller, and reflexive conscience. Not all the voices will have equal text time; not all the voices will agree with each other; and not all the voices will have a full or complete understanding of the issues, concepts, feelings, and ideals; however, all the voices, in polyphonic dialogue, will attempt to help you, the reader, enter—with your storied lives—the storied lives of the participants I have tried to represent. The inquirer’s voice, represented in this font, Times New Roman, will tell the bulk of the story. *The voice of the storyteller, represented in this font, Times New Roman (italics), will weave in between the inquirer’s voice, my storied life, and the storied lives of the participants in this study.* The voice of the reflexive conscience, represented in this font, Arial Narrow, will speak reflexively and critically: sometimes conjecturing—possibly blurring into balderdash; other times confidently—possibly blurring into fearlessness; but always humbly—realizing that this is only one of many possible interpretations.

In the next chapter, I briefly examine the research on the disproportionate school failure of other minoritized students in North American that can reasonably inform the

issue of disaffected South Asian male students. The bulk of that chapter, however, I devote to identifying and explicating the theoretical constructs that undergird, direct, and guide this study. In Chapter 3, I explicate the rationale and process of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that forms the methodology of this study. Chapter 4 is about context; since all narrative research texts are temporal texts, they are “placed” not abstracted from the milieu that help fashion their existence. Hence, I examine the key school and community demographic data of the school; ground this study within the larger Indo-Canadian “problem” as positioned by the Canadian media; examine the narratives of violence and criminality associated with the South Asian male students who attended Montclair High School approximately seven years ago; and conclude the chapter with a narrative that attempts to voice the heartfelt outrage experienced by many of the male South Asian students I interviewed at Montclair High School. In Chapter 5, I examine the four discursive categories that were used to position the identities of the South Asian male students at Montclair High. In the next five chapters—six to ten—I examine in detail how the identities of the *Brown boys or Brown crew*—the disaffected South Asian male students who are purported to experience disproportionate academic failure and disciplinary measures—are positioned and how they position their own identities. In Chapter 11, using narratives extensively, I examine how the Brown boys are complicit in the pathologizing of their own identities. In the final chapter, I sum up the research findings using my three guiding questions, identify some implications of these findings, and propose some recommendations for practice.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

The purpose of a review of literature is to locate an inquiry or study in a specific corpus of scholarship in order to contextualize and provide meaning and justification for its conduct. A review of the literature for this study, however, poses a challenge particularly because critical research in the area of schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students is minimal. Although the dearth of such literature indicates that this research is necessary, it makes attempts to locate it problematic. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I examine briefly the research on the disproportionate school failure of other minoritized students in North American that can reasonably inform this issue of disaffected South Asian male students. Second, I identify and explicate the theoretical constructs that undergird, direct, and guide this study. In the spirit of an intellectual bricoleur, I attempt to integrate these theoretical frameworks from varying disciplines and traditions to create a provocative meaning system to help interpret the research data that I have collected and constructed.

As I illustrated in Chapter 1, there is increasing concern in many schools of the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, British Columbia that a growing number of South Asian boys are experiencing academic failure and disaffection. Yet, very few studies have investigated the academic performance and schooling experiences of South Asian male students. Gibson and Bhachu (1991) conducted a sociological study of immigrant male and female Sikh students living in Great Britain and California. They concluded that despite living in hostile environments and experiencing explicit and implicit forms of discrimination, both the male and female Sikh adolescents persisted with their educational aspirations. This persistence, claim the authors, is a result of a belief system

held by most of the Sikh immigrant families in those locations that upward mobility in society can be primarily achieved through success in education. Additionally, Gibson and Bhachu (1991) found that female Sikh students, both in California and in Great Britain, eclipsed male Sikh students, and other male and female student from the dominant society, in grade point average; they did not, however, offer any reasons for the girls' success.

In a recent study that examined the spelling and writing self-efficacy beliefs of 81 South Asians students⁵ (40 males and 41 females), Klassen and Georgiou (2008) found that “the male Indo-Canadians displayed lower motivation for academic achievement, lower spelling and writing performance, and lower reported past and future English grades than female Indo-Canadians” (p. 322). Out of all the students studied, which included 70 “Anglo-Canadian” male and female students, the male Indo-Canadian students exhibited the “lowest levels of confidence for self-regulation (e.g., finishing homework, planning schoolwork, concentrating on school subjects), whereas female Indo-Canadians rated their self-regulatory confidence higher than any other group” (p.321-322). Klassen and Georgiou propose two explanations for the low academic performance of the Indo-Canadian male students. First, they posit that the Indo-Canadian male adolescents had more difficulty than their female counterparts in balancing their cultural values with the values of the dominant culture. The authors assume that immigrant youth who are able to exhibit “a pattern of integration”, which they define as “being involved in both cultures,” (p. 322) are psychologically and socio-culturally better adjusted. The ease in integration, they argue, may translate into higher levels of academic functioning. The authors' second explanation is that “male Indo-Canadians may rely

⁵ Defined by the authors as Indo-Canadian Punjabi Sikh immigrants

more heavily on the traditional cultural value of hierarchy, whereas the female adolescents—more quickly acculturated—recognized the rules of schooling, where merit or place in the academic hierarchy is earned through academic performance” (p. 322). Klassen and Georgiou suggest that the male Indo-Canadian students are more entrenched in the traditional Indian culture of “verticalness” or hierarchy and that these students assume that accomplishment and rewards are their rights instead of capital to be earned. As a result, they were less prepared than the Indo-Canadian female students to develop their competencies and achieve academic success.

Despite the dearth of critical educational research in this area, there is compelling evidence from research on the disproportional school failure of other minoritized students, particularly from the United States, that may or may not inform this issue of disaffected South Asian students (Brathwaite & James, 1996; Connell et al., 1994; Dei, 1997 et al., 1997; Dei et al., 1995; James, 1990; NCES, 1998, 2002; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Samunda et al., 1989; Solomon, 1992; and Whaley and Smyler, 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics (1998, 2002) reports that disproportionate number of minoritized students, predominantly African American and Hispanic students, lag behind grade-level proficiency in key examinable subject areas such as math, reading, social studies, and science. Ford and Harris (1996) state that minoritized students struggle socially and emotionally to adjust in North American schools and hence are inordinately overrepresented in special education and remedial classrooms and programs.

Even though the preponderance of educational literature on the disproportional school failure of minoritized students is American, there are a few key Canadian studies that report similar trends and findings. Brown (1993); Braithwaite and James, (1996); and

Dei et al., (1995) report that African Canadians, First Nation, and Portuguese students suffer deep disengagement from school. Forty-two percent of most of these disengaged African and Portuguese Canadian students eventually drop out of school compared to thirty percent for the general population (Dei, 2003). Many other studies recount that a preponderance of minoritized students are underrepresented in advanced tracks leading to post-secondary education and overrepresented in basic tracks leading to vocational programs (Cummins, 1997; Dei, 2003; Dei, et al., 1997; Statistics Canada, 1991). In light of these persistent or incessant experiences of academic failure, it is not difficult to see, then, how these minoritized students “lose faith in their ability to perform in school and come to see themselves as failures” (Kincheloe, 2007; p. 8). Understandably, feelings and dispositions of apathy, inadequacy, disinterest, and anomie surface in their behaviour and actions. Disaffection becomes the wage of not only repeated failure but of “larger constructions of inferiority” (p. 8). A vicious cycle of failure, disaffection, and remediation spirals out of control obscuring the causes from the effects. Indeed, this literature on disproportional school failure of minoritized students in North America may or may not apply or inform the disaffection of the South Asian male students, but it should be examined as part of the background, context, and discourse of this study.

More directly related to the South Asian students, a study conducted by East Metro Youth Services (Sharma, et al., 2005) on South Asian youth in Toronto describes some key areas of difficulty that South Asian students are experiencing. Although the EMYS is not an educational study, it captures the voice of many South Asian youth that helps frame this study. Thirty-four Toronto school representatives were surveyed in this study and the data showed that schools “identified learning problems as a significant

issue facing South Asian youth. Other problems included: racism, lack of freedom, negative peer interactions, poverty, cultural conflicts with parents and peers, language barriers, and cultural beliefs” (p.30). In this same study, thirty-six percent of South Asian boys self-reported that they were “more likely to worry about failing school” (p.18). Twenty-two percent of the South Asian boys also stated that they “were more likely to have been suspended or expelled” (p.18). This self-reporting of school suspension and expulsion among South Asian boys resonates with the larger narrative of the disproportionate discipline of minoritized students (Munroe, C.R., 2005; Raffaele Mendez, et al., 2003; Skiba, et al., 2002). Even though these and many other examples of disproportional school failure, disproportionate disciplining, disaffection, and overall anomie of other minority students from around North America have the possibility to adequately illuminate the issues of disaffection and disengagement among South Asian students in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, British Columbia, a study is required to understand the nature, extent, and dimensions of this disaffection and disengagement.

Any investigation to understand the schooling experiences of a disaffected group of minoritized students can be grounded, either implicitly or explicitly, using a variety of different theoretical constructs. Different epistemologies will offer different interpretations, accounts, and understandings of the same experience (Hammersley, 1992). It is therefore, incumbent on me as a researcher to make explicit the theoretical constructs, lenses, and perspectives that are employed in this study.

Identity

At the heart of this study is the subject of identity. To understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students—the central objective of this

study—I must examine what is meant by schooling experiences with respect to how these South Asian males are positioned and how they position themselves. In other words, how these students are positioned by educators and other students and how they position themselves will shape how they interpret their schooling experiences. Below, therefore, I examine and critique the prevailing theories of identity representation and construction that undergird current educational discourse and practice. I do this in three ways. I explore how subjects are positioned by others and how they position themselves. I review the literature of some prominent cultural theorists and poststructuralists that examine how subjects are represented through discursive practices and how they are recruited and assigned positions. Second, I review the postpositivist realist theory of identity to build an argument for the epistemic significance of identity. Third, since identity representation and construction occurs within a political and social milieu, I review the different variations of multiculturalism that individually, or in combination, have influenced and shaped how schools position the identities of minoritized students.

Deconstruction of the unitary, stable, and integral identity has occurred in the past two decades within a variety of disciplines (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008; Hall, 1997a, 1997b, 2000; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000; West, 2002; Woodward, 1997). Although I am not going to recapitulate the vast literature of postmodern and poststructural critique of the essential self or subject, I do want to briefly examine the relationship between subjects and discursive practices and how the politics of difference, inherent in the study of identity, is constructed and represented. According to postmodern and poststructural epistemology, identities do not exist outside of the structures of language. Poststructuralists would claim that our social world is constructed by the signs and

signifiers of language and that we can only understand this world through the meanings that these signs and signifiers create (Hassard, 1993). That is, they posit that it is signs, codes, and signifying systems that organize the social world. The social world, according to poststructural thought, is not a reflection of an *a priori* objective world but one that is constructed in a language where meanings are created within an infinite and inter-textual play of signifiers. Where Saussure, a structuralist, theorized a distinct relationship between signifier (word) and signified (object), which guarantees a distinct end point of meaning, poststructuralists claim that this relationship does not exist—there is nothing that a signifier ultimately refers to—and as a result, meaning is constantly deferred (Best & Kellner, 1991). That is, poststructuralists claim that a signifier does not point to or produce a "signified"; instead it creates an endless chain of signifiers—one signifier is what it is because it's not something else—and hence a stable meaning is never achieved.

Hence, if identities do not exist outside of language, they are, then, inextricably linked to the practices and processes of signification. They are fictions of language. Like texts, identities must be *read*. Unlike the stability, determinacy, and permanency that issue from a modernist's construct of identity, the social and symbolic systems of poststructuralism operate to yield identities that are unstable, indeterminate, and ephemeral.

Identities as Signifying Practices

Hall (1997a, 1997b, 2000) employs carefully some of the useful stratagems that have precipitated from the postmodern and poststructural critique. Using Derrida's assemblage⁶ of *différance*, Hall challenges the established binaries that secure meaning

⁶ According to Derrida (1972) *différance* is neither a word nor a concept" (p.7). He uses the word "assemblage" because it captures the web-like interlocking representation of difference.

and representation and subsequently illustrates the slippage and unfinished nature of meaning. To capture the nature of difference within signifiers and subsequently the endless deferral of meaning in discourse, Derrida (2000) cleverly coined a term *différance*, which is the amalgam of the two meanings of the French verb *différer* (to differ and to defer). Derrida contends that meanings of words are never complete; they are never in the same place as themselves but are always just along the line between differing and deferring. Guretzki (2002) clarifies, "*différance* speaks simultaneously of the tendency of words to differentiate themselves (i.e., "to differ") from other words and of necessity, "to defer" to other words in order to situate their proper meaning." Norris, too, is particularly clear, *différance*

remains suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer', both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. Language depends on difference, as Saussure showed ... the structure of distinctive propositions which make up its basic economy. Where Derrida breaks new ground ... is in the extent to which 'differ' shades into 'defer' ... the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to this point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification. (quoted in Hall, 1997b; p.54).

Similarly, since identities are constructed through, not outside of, difference (Hall, 2000), they

are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply [sic] constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1997b; p.17).

For Hall (1997a, 1997b, 2000) and others (Bauman, 2003; Gilroy, 1997; Mercer, 1990; Rutherford, 1990; Woodward, 1997) identities constructed in text and born of difference cannot be pinned down; they are constantly being deferred, prolonged, and serialized. Hall (1997b) states lucidly, "we should think of identity as a 'production', which is never

complete, always in process, and always constituted within not outside of representation" (p. 51).

Although Hall argues for the indeterminate nature of identity, he does not slip into the nihilistic critique which has diminished the legitimacy of the postmodern and poststructural epistemologies. Neither does he posit that identities are fully discursive: free-floating and contingent, anchorless and without an historical, cultural, and economic context. He, like the postpositive realist thinkers (Alcoff & Mohanty, 2006; Hames-Garcia, 2000; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006), whose theoretical framework of identity I espouse, and will argue for shortly, claim that we all operate from a specific place, time, history, and culture. These locations are, as Butler (1993) states, "forcibly materialized through time" (p. 1). In other words, who subjects are and how they are positioned and perceived in this world very much affect their present and potential life chances. Moya (2000), a postpositive realist thinker, summarizes this point cogently:

The significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories. Who we are—that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived to be—will significantly affect our life chances: where we can live, whom we will marry (or whether we can marry), and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us. (p. 8)

Identities as Positions

By first clarifying some terms and concepts, let me examine how Hall (1997a, 1997b, 2000) claims identities are constructed within and across difference. Often in the literature, the terms identity and subjectivity are used interchangeably; despite considerable overlap, these terms signify different meanings. According to Woodward (1997), subjectivity includes our sense of self. Used as an alternative to "actor" or "individual," the term denotes "a rejection of the idea that individual human beings are

the sole originators of social relations" (Marshall, 1998; p. 651). Other factors such as governmental and non-governmental institutions, market place economies, and civil societies markedly influence social relations. Subjectivity names the conscious and unconscious parts of ourselves that bring meaning to our lives. It involves our deepest feelings and thoughts. Yet, as Woodward (1997) claims, "we experience our subjectivity in a social context where language and culture give meaning to our experience of ourselves and where we adopt an identity. Discourses, whatever sets of meaning they construct, can only be effective if they recruit subjects" (p. 39). Subjects, then, can only understand themselves through the signifying practices they engage in. They position themselves within these signifying practices. These *positions* that they adopt and identify with comprise their identities. Thus, as Hall (1997b) asserts, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves ..." (p. 52). Interpellation, a term coined by Louis Althusser, refers to the process whereby a subject is *recruited* into a subject-position through self-recognition and self-awareness (Woodward, 1997). Through this concept, Althusser argues that human beings are not fully autonomous, coherent, and actualized subjects; rather, they are deeply implicated in discursive and social structures, which construct their identities (Woodward, 1997). It is the adoption of a subject-position or interpellation that provides the subject its identity.

Building on these concepts of subjectivity, positioning, and interpellation, Hall (1997b) advances his argument about identity construction:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'.

Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (p. 19)

Of salience here is what Hall calls the point of *suture*; it is during this act that identities come to light. That is, identities are the positions that the subject adopts while always being aware that these positions are but *representations* constructed in language across and through difference. Accordingly, identities are more than discursive constructions; they are more than subjects with conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings. They are the temporary meeting points where subjects assume or adopt subject-positions. These subject positions, which are also semiotic constructions, provide subjects with a way to articulate themselves. Consequently, suturing becomes an articulation process of a subject. The articulation is the temporary identity of the subject.

Since signification in postmodern epistemology depends on Derrida's assemblage of *differé*nce, meanings arise at an arbitrary and temporary "break" of this infinite chain of signification. That is, since meanings of words, in theory, are never complete and they are always just along the line between differing and deferring, in practice, for meanings to be understood and acted upon, they must be stable—albeit temporarily—in this endless succession of signification. Hall (1997b) is poetic in his explanation:

For if signification depends upon the endless repositioning of its differential terms, meaning, in any specific instance, depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop—the necessary and temporary 'break' in the infinite semiosis of language ... It only threatens to do so if we mistake this 'cut' of identity—this *positioning*, which makes meaning possible—as a natural and permanent, rather than an arbitrary and contingent 'ending'—whereas I understand every such position as 'strategic' and arbitrary, in the sense that there is no permanent equivalence between the particular sentence we close, and its true meaning, as such. Meaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible (p.54-55).

Indeed, Hall claims that identities refer to the suture between the subject and the arbitrary and contingent stop point in the infinite semiosis of language. The temporary "freeze" in the succession of meanings provides us with an identity we can recognize and act upon. The meanings, however, continue to unfold in this incessant chain of signification. The identity that is "frozen" momentarily is one of many possibilities; hence, an identity today can conceivably be different from an identity tomorrow.

Postpositivist Realist Theory

Although Hall and other cultural and postmodern theorists have advanced an eloquent and coherent theory of how "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves" (Hall, 1997b; p. 52), they do not, however, account for the epistemic significance and consequences of identity. That is, who individuals understand themselves to be will have direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their worlds. Who individuals are, who they perceive to be, or who they are perceived by others to be will considerably affect their life opportunities and fortunes. Identities are not only temporary "freezes" and "breaks" in the dialectic of power and language, but are chosen and assigned for complex subjective reasons (Moya, 2000) that directly and indirectly affect individuals' understanding of the world and how they function, socially, materially, and economically in the world. For a theory of identity that escapes the assaults of discursive fictionality and essentialism—which I will examine later in this chapter—and begins to theorize the connections among social locations, experience, cultural identity, materiality, and knowledge I draw on the work of Mohanty's (1995, 2000) construction of postpositivist realist theory.

Before I examine the six major claims of a postpositive realist theory of identity, let me briefly clarify my interpretation and understanding of “realism.” A realist epistemology claims that a “reality” does exist outside or independently of our cognitive or linguistic construction of it (Mohanty, 1995, 2000; Moya, 2000). Even though our cognitive processes through discursive practices helps us, for better or worse, interpret and understand our world, our constructions of the world does not “constitute the totality of what can be considered ‘real’” (Moya, 2000; p. 70). “When the postpositive realist says that something is ‘real,’” Moya continues, “she does not mean to say that it is not socially constructed; rather her point is that it is not *only* socially constructed” [emphasis mine] (p. 70). A reality does exist outside our cognitive constructions that attempt to understand it. This reality, however, is not understood as the modernist conception of an objective reality that is omniscient, transcendental, and unmediated. Instead, it is a reality that is understood as the “best possible” interpretation or explanation that has undergone a rigorous process of investigation—based on the tenets and assumptions of the discipline that is constructing it—and polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) by a community of inquirers in that discipline. This type of reality is seen more as a “social achievement” (Mohanty, 1995; p 115) than a Plato’s universe of Hellenistic truths. This postpositive interpretation of reality has in its definition the possibility of “fallibility, self-correction, and improvement” (Mohanty, 1995; p. 115).

The major claim of a postpositivist reality theory of identity, as first articulated by the literary theorist Mohanty (2000), states that "personal experience is socially and theoretically constructed, and it is precisely in this mediated way that it yields knowledge" (p. 31). Using examples from Scheman's illuminating essay *Anger and the*

Politics of Naming, Mohanty argues that human experiences have a cognitive and theoretical component that must be recognized. Mohanty (2000) questions the validity of a fundamental assumption that is deeply embedded in many of the educational and counseling theories practiced in the field: Emotions are a private and an inner possession of a subject; these emotions have an inherent private logic that must be represented or released from the inner sanctum of that subject. They argue that this assumption is flawed and must be re-examined. They posit that emotions become meaningful only through the mediation of theoretical, political, and social frameworks that the subject employs for herself. That is, emotions and personal feelings do not have intrinsic or transparent meanings; they are, among other things, theoretical matters that rely on epistemologies to make sense. Mohanty (2000) explains,

this new emotion, say, anger, and the ways it is experienced are not purely personal or individual. A necessary part of its form and shape is determined by the non-individual social meanings that the theories and accounts supply. It would be false to say that this emotion is the individual's own "inner" possession and that she alone has "privileged access" to its meaning or significance. Rather, our emotions provide evidence of the extent to which even our deepest personal experiences are socially constructed, mediated by visions and values that are "political" in nature, that refer outward to the world beyond the individual." (p. 34)

This epistemic status of experience, then, eloquently attends to the essentialist predicament of cultural identity that postmodernism fails to address. That is, experiences, in this theoretically mediated form, do not assure or guarantee that my experiences will be similar or the same as others from my social or cultural group. This argument forms the second important claim of a postpositivist realist theory of identity: A subject's experiences will shape, but not completely determine, the creation of her identity (Moya, 2000). Even though I may share core values and similar lifestyles as others in my social

group, my experiences are different because my meaning-making systems that allow me to interpret these experiences are particular to my individual history, context, and abilities. Moya (2000) is precise:

Because the theories through which humans interpret their experiences vary from individual to individual, from time to time, and from situation to situation, it follows that different people's interpretations of the same kind of event will differ. (p. 82)

I must note that like the Nobel prize winner Ilya Prigogine's dissipative structures⁷, our meaning making systems are not static and thus do not interpret experiences the same way every time. Although our meaning systems shape our understanding of the world, they too, are shaped by that understanding and those experiences; this iterative process allows our meaning systems to continually evolve and adapt to new circumstances. To recap, unlike postmodernist thought, which generally claims that personal experiences are capricious and slippery because of their discursive and semiotic difficulties, postpositivist thought claims that experiences in their theoretically mediated form contain a "cognitive" component through which we can gain access to knowledge of the world" (Moya, 2000; p. 81). It is these experiences that will influence the formation of a subject's identity.

The third important claim of a postpositivist realist theory of identity is that a person's experience will, for the most part, be determined by his or her social location in a given society (Moya, 2000). So, different social categories, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class that together determine a person's social location will influence her life experiences. Hence, an individual who is socially coded "Brown," "Muslim," "male,"

⁷ Wheately (1992) describes dissipative structures as living systems that regenerate themselves to higher levels of self-organization in response to environmental demands. She states, "He [Prigogine] called these systems dissipative structures because they dissipate their energy in order to recreate themselves into new forms of organization. Faced with amplifying levels of disturbance, these systems possess innate properties to reconfigure themselves so that they can deal with the new information. For this reason, they are frequently called self-organizing or self-renewing systems." (p. 89)

and “heterosexual” will experience different situations, experiences, and realities than another individual, who is socially coded “White,” “Christian,” “female,” and “heterosexual.” Similarly, however, a Brown, heterosexual, Muslim male with abundant financial resources will have decidedly different experiences than a Brown, male, heterosexual Muslim with minimal or scarce financial resources. Obviously, these examples can multiply indefinitely; however, of salience here is that social locations and their varying combinations will extensively influence the experiences of any individual.

It is crucial to clarify here that there does not exist an *a priori* relationship between experience and social location (Moya, 2000); not every individual in a particular social location will accrue the same or similar experiences. Social location does not beget specific knowledge that everyone in that social location shares; rather social locations may structure or organize certain circumstances but inevitably, as mentioned above, it is how the individual theoretically interprets these circumstances that makes it an “experience.”

Let me employ Bourdieu's ingenious and discerning concept of habitus to clarify this point further. Bourdieu (1990) defines habitus as "a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings" (p. 59). That is, habitus is a repository term for all the possible experiences—social, cultural, economic, religious, etc.—that helps shape or forge an individual's identity. Using this concept, Bourdieu theorizes how individuals from a social group "acquire, as a result of their socialization, a set of *embodied* dispositions—or ways of viewing, and living in the world" (May, 1999; p. 28). Similarly, then, social locations, like habitus, are "both shaped by, and also *shape*, objective social

and cultural conditions which surround it" (May, 1999; p. 28). Nash (1999) deftly advances this point, which we can apply to our understanding of social locations:

the habitus is thus a system of durable dispositions inculcated by objective structural conditions, but since it is embodied, the habitus develops a history and generates its practices, for some period of time, even after the original material conditions which gave rise to it have disappeared. (p.184)

However, like habitus, social location is not structurally deterministic. Social locations do not singularly determine experiences and behaviours of individuals; instead, they *orient* rather than precisely shape the individual's actions (May, 1999). Hence, again like habitus, at the core of social locations is a varying degree of choice. Some choices may be restrained and others spurred by the different mixture of social locations' and, subsequently, their ways of structuring and organizing the world. Therefore, an individual's experience depends both on the nature of the social locations and the theoretically mediated interpretations of her position in those social locations. Bourdieu closes this point

Habitus, like every art of inventing ... makes it possible to produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable (like the corresponding situations) but [which are] also limited in their diversity. (quoted in May, 1999; p. 28)

The fourth major claim of a postpositivist realist theory is a logical inference from the first two claims: since there is a cognitive element to experiences and experiences influence the formation of identities, then one can conclude that there is a cognitive element to identity. This is a critical point because, like postmodern thought that claims identities are fluid, mutable, and contradictory, postpositivist thought claims that a subject's identity can undergo many revisions and re-interpretations as her interpretations of experiences change overtime. In other words, as subjects re-describe or

re-interpret their experiences with their perpetually reconstituted and reflexive epistemological frameworks, they may change, in varying degrees, their views of themselves, others, or their circumstances.

The fifth major claim of a postpositivist realist theory of identity is that an individual's ability to interpret and understand essential facets of her world is contingent on her ability to critically discern the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of her social location (Moya, 2000). Assuming that our social world is "constitutively defined by our relations of domination" (Mohanty, quoted in Moya, 2000; p. 85), an individual must acknowledge the many possible ways that she will position her identity and her identity will be positioned within a "culture of power" (Delpit, 1995). Identity is not simply the confluence of different social categories (race, class, sex, ability, among others), but also how those social categories are positioned within a culture of power. Structural forces in the culture of power will privilege some and disadvantage other social categories that together make up an individual's identity. Hence, the epistemic consequences of identities must take into account the power asymmetries inherent in our social worlds.

The sixth and final claim of a postpositivist realist theory of identity states that "oppositional struggle" (Moya, 2000; p. 86) and considering alternative epistemologies are fundamental and necessary to understand our social world more accurately. "The 'alternative constructions and accounts' generated through oppositional struggle provide new ways of looking at our world that always complicate and often challenge dominant conceptions of what is 'right', 'true', and 'beautiful'" (p. 86). It is through the epistemologies of the historically subjugated that we can revise, break down, and even

reconstruct dominant ideologies that determine the nature and action of our social world. Hence, a postpositivist realist theory of identity claims that oppositional struggle and engaging with alternate epistemologies are crucial practices for identities to achieve or renew their epistemic privilege⁸.

Now that I have examined the postmodern and postpositive realist theories of identity, let me make explicit how these theoretical constructs undergird this study. The fundamental assumption I make in order to investigate the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students is: How these South Asian students are positioned by educators and other students and how they position themselves will influence and even shape how they interpret their schooling experiences, as well as how they will interact with others beyond school. In other words, identities have epistemic significance and consequences. Who students understand themselves to be will have direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their worlds. The signifying and representational practices of postmodernism and the postpositivist realist theory of identity provide this study with the conceptual tools to interpret, examine, and problematize the “positioning” of these students’ identities. In other words, by examining how these students are positioned and how they position themselves—using the lenses of postmodern and postpositive realist epistemologies—I will be able to provide one possible and hopefully, meaningful, account of the schooling experiences of these disaffected South Asian male students.

⁸ Epistemic privilege, Moya (2000) defines as “a special advantage with respect to possessing or acquiring knowledge about how fundamental aspects of our society (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) operate to sustain matrices of power” (p. 80-81).

Multiculturalism

Positioning of identities, whether done by others or oneself, occurs both at the micro or individual level and the macro or societal/global level. Indeed, the politics of identity is one of the central forces behind nationalist movements (Taylor, 1994). The demand for recognition, which is inextricably linked to the construction and production of identities, is a central motif in our political landscape. Governance of diversity and difference (Fleras, 2009) has become the conundrum of our times. Advocacy groups of all types—minority, ability, religious, sexuality, and gender—are demanding recognition, claiming that “the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression” (Taylor, 1994). In recent times, the doctrine of multiculturalism has become the blueprint and governance discourse for cooperative co-existence, difference, and diversity (Fleras, 2009). Whether it “is largely about managing diversity by depoliticizing difference,” or “politicizing difference by managing the mainstream” (p. 109), multiculturalism began as “a society-building idea with noble intentions” (p. 1). Despite the moral and social consternation of the post-9/11 and 7/7 in London, which has critically challenged the *raison d’être* of multiculturalism (Fleras, 2009), it is still a goal, concept, value, strategy, or attitude (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) that most adeptly engages with the politics of difference and recognition.

How Identities are Understood in the Different Variants of Multiculturalism

I invoke, in this study, a discussion and examination of multiculturalism for the following reason: Multiculturalism, despite its permutations over the years, is intended, as Kymlicka (1997) states, “to make it possible for people to retain and express their identities” (p. 8). The politics of identity feature prominently in the discourse of

multiculturalism. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that a close examination of the different constructs of multiculturalism would reveal the different expressions of identities featured within its discourses. In other words, because multiculturalism is about recognition, and identities are partly shaped by recognition, its absence, or even misrecognition (Taylor, 1994), a close examination of how multiculturalism is interpreted, constructed, and applied in our public institutions—such as schools—will reveal how identities are interpreted, constructed, and applied. To clarify even further, in order to investigate the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian males students and understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to these students, this study must also recognize and consider the interpretation of multiculturalism employed in the school to manage or regulate difference. That is, the variants of multiculturalism that are understood and practiced by the educators and educational leaders in the school will influence how the identities of minoritized students will be positioned. Inspired by McLaren's (1995) astute critique of multiculturalism, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) identify five variants of multiculturalism—conservative, liberal, pluralist, essentialist, and critical that inform how identities are positioned. The first two are antiquated constructs that no longer capture or inform the public or academic imagination and, hence, I do not reference or explain them below. I do, however, use the last three categories—which I submit are still the dominant interpretations of multiculturalism—to explicate how identities are constructed, represented, and positioned in our schools today.

Pluralist Multiculturalism

Pluralist multiculturalism, also commonly referred to as diversity celebration, is the form of multiculturalism that has entered deep into the collective consciousness of North American society (Banks & Banks, 2003). Multicultural education and most diversity enhancing curriculum programs reflect the philosophy of this brand of multiculturalism. Plural multiculturalism differs from liberal multiculturalism by highlighting and glorifying difference, whereas the latter exalts the benefits of sameness. However, the divergence of the two ends here; both, implicitly or explicitly, decontextualize and dehistoricize culture, race, and gender and both unwittingly reinscribe Whiteness and Eurocentricism as the norm (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). At the heart of pluralist multiculturalism's agenda is to celebrate human diversity and equal opportunity. However, the result is exoticizing and fetishizing the allegedly valuable diversity while leaving the structural forces of patriarchy, class disparity, and White superiority deeply entrenched in the psyche and practice of our institutions. Pride in one culture and heritage without attending to these power asymmetries is a futile exercise. Although pluralist multiculturalism allegedly champions the expression of minority identities, in reality, it disguises political empowerment with personal affirmation (Yudice, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

The pluralist multiculturalism's aspiration to singularly champion the importance of minority difference, too, can be legitimately challenged. Well meaning festivals, carnivals, and bazaars are inaugurated to celebrate ethnic diversity but, too often, the result is that the difference is viewed from the position of Whiteness. That is, the Eurocentric gaze fixes difference as exotic and unique and externalizes it as the amusing

or entertaining Other. Or, arguably worse, the difference is "predatorized" and re-interpreted in a vocabulary better understood using the dominant Western idiom or representation.

Essentialist Multiculturalism

The construct of identity implicit in the essentialist multiculturalism is most commonly based on the Enlightenment subject—which is seen as stable, unified, determinate, and complete (Hall, 1990). Within this modernist paradigm, groups are identified by characteristics that are assumed and accepted as inherent and intrinsic (Dolby, 2000; Gosine, 2002). That is, groups are viewed as having an essence or "core" identity that unites the individuals that comprise the group. This group or cultural identity is based on a "collective of one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (Hall, 1997b; p.51). These common historical experiences and joint cultural customs produce an identity of "one people," which anchor and define the group. Simply put, "essentialism expresses itself through the tendency to see one social category (class, gender, race, sexuality, etc...) as determinate in the last instance for the cultural identity of the individual or group in question" (Moya, 2000; p. 80). Often, essentialism can be read as biological or natural (Woodward, 1997).

The politics of essentialization is complex and multi-directional. Who essentializes and who is essentialized are two questions that uncover the centrality of power that undergirds the discourses of representation and difference. Difference, in the modernist paradigm, has predominately been understood in the either/or realm of binary logic. Anything that is outside the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) of the dominant group is

considered different and referred to disparagingly as “Other.” Hall (1997b) claims that difference is negatively interpreted as the marginalization and exclusion of those who are seen as “Other.” Referencing Derrida, Laclau, and Butler, Hall (2000) states that,

it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed." (p. 17)

Alluding to the powerful and deeply entrenched concept of binaries, which is common to the modernist's system of thought, Hall argues that clear oppositions such as white/black, spiritual/material, and East/West are differentially weighted so that one constituent of the dichotomy is more authoritative or prized than the other (Woodward, 1997). One of the two terms in the dualism is situated as the "norm" while the other, contrasting term, is positioned as "abnormal." Similarly, the secondary term of the modernist's identity binary, Self/Other, is positioned as "aberrant," "deviant," or "alien." Contrastingly, the first term in that binary, "Self," reflects the dominant point of view and is read as "legitimate," "natural" or "normal." The power differential inherent between the two terms results in the privileging of one term and the marginalizing of the other term. Hall (2000) quotes Laclau, who argues compellingly that the act of identity construction is an act of power:

If ... an objectivity manages to partially affirm itself it is only by repressing that which threatens it. Derrida has shown how an identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles—man/woman, etc... What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black-white [sic] relationship, in which white [sic], of course, is equivalent to 'human being'. 'Woman' and 'black' are thus 'marks' (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms of 'man' and 'white.' (p. 18)

Imposed and self-ascribed essentialization.

The most common form of essentialization, which I call imposed essentialization, arises when a dominant group ascribes characteristics of identity onto a minoritized group claiming that these attributes best represent and describe all the people in that minoritized group. It can be even more severe than this: groups can be seen to have an immutable and definite "essence" that characterizes their innate nature. Through the processes of signification and power that I have already elaborated on, markers—that are usually derogatory—are affixed to a group of people that eventually become the defining features of that group.

The other form of essentialism, which I call *self-ascribed* essentialism, arises when minoritized groups resist their marginalization by reclaiming and unequivocally reaffirming their ethnic and national identities. Under the policies of multiculturalism, colonized people, who have lost or concealed their identities for the purposes of survival, are now resurrecting these identities to counter their experiences of marginalization. May (1999) is precise:

Such a conception may well be motivated by a principal concern to acknowledge positively cultural difference, to address historical and current patterns of disadvantage, racism and marginalization, and, from that, to effect the greater pluralization of the nation-state, particularly in its public sphere. (p. 21)

Similarly, to cope with the perceived fragmentation and dissolution of their societies as a result of "multiculturalism gone awry," dominant groups are also "soul-searching" for their old ethnic certainties. "We must return to our good old family values" and "Here, we speak English; if 'they' don't want to speak English, let them go back to where they came from" are examples of nostalgia for a culturally homogenous lost past or "golden age."

The heritage "industry" (Woodward, 1997), which includes books, film, and media not only packages an identity that most reflects the values of the dominant group, but implicitly implies that this version of identity is the best and only acceptable version possible. In both cases, nevertheless, old ethnic certainties are reclaimed and "naturalized" in order for the minority or dominant groups to mobilize their social and political projects.

Critical Multiculturalism

Critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994), which lays the foundation for this type of multiculturalism, primarily addresses how power is used for the purposes of domination. Critical multiculturalists challenge modernist or positivist constructions of identity that dominate conservative, liberal, and essentialist brands of multiculturalism and attempt to expose how power, like capillaries in the circulatory system (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) permeates and hierarchicizes the social domain. Essentially, critical multiculturalists endeavour to reveal the covert and recondite educational procedures that privilege the reigning dominant culture and undermine the accomplishments and aspirations of the subordinate culture. They understand that minoritized groups are positioned in a hierarchy or as Porter (1965) labels, the Canadian vertical mosaic, where some minoritized groups in social positions are conferred weightier status than others. Critical multiculturalists make visible this hierarchy (Bolaria & Li, 1988) and ensure that "[White] Canadian experience" and "[White] Canadian credentials" (Jiwani, 2006) are not the preferred identities imposed on minoritized students. They are also aware that "social inequalities are produced and perpetuated through systemic discrimination and

justified through societal ideology of merit, social mobility, and individual responsibility” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; p. 22).

Critical multiculturalists understand that our educational institutions perpetuate the myth of “the level playing field” and overemphasize the ambit and influence of meritocracy. In reality, however, educational institutions erect social and systemic structures that seriously impede the mobility and advancement of groups who reside at the bottom of the vertical mosaic. Critical multiculturalists understand the power asymmetries inherent in schools and attempt to boldly name the injustices that lurk deep within the intention and action of educational policies and educational practitioners. They endeavour to dismantle, one piece at a time, the structures that embolden and fortify inequalities that too often masquerade as taken-for-granted policies and practices. To resist or even assuage this invisible unyielding social undertow requires mettle. It requires strength to stare into failure but see hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, 2007; Goldstein, 2007; Jocson, 2007; Palmer, 1998; Kincheloe, 2007; Wyngaard, 2007). Despite the odds, critical multiculturalists continue to uncover the fingerprints of hegemony invisible on curriculum, pedagogy, and policy and aspire to reconceptualise them within a larger concern for social justice.

Disrupting power is not only about removing social and systemic structures that obstruct or restrain the mobility and advancement of minoritized groups; it is also about recognizing one’s own ethnocentrism and biases in the form of “everyday” language and actions for revelations about the insidious ways that “tacit racial politics operate” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; p. 25). Critical multiculturalists advocate the necessity of self-reflection and consciousness awareness in detecting how identities are shaped by

dominant perspectives. Hence, if individuals become aware of how their identities are influenced by hegemonic inscriptions, they have the potential to confront these pathologizing behaviours. In other words, critical multiculturalists must also be aware of their *own* motives, assumptions, beliefs, prejudices, and values about human behaviour (Weinstein et al., 2004). Since the cadre of teachers in North America is still overwhelmingly White, middle class, and monolingual English (Ladson-Billings, 2001), there is a tendency to implicitly or explicitly perpetuate a view of “Whiteness” as the cultural norm. Given the majority of the teachers and educational leaders at Montclair high school and, in fact, the entire Rowling school district⁹, are predominately White, let me examine, briefly, the construct of Whiteness.

Whiteness.

Whiteness, as McLaren (1998) states,

is not only mythopoetical in the sense that it constructs a totality of illusions formed around the ontological superiority of the Euro-American subject ... it is also a refusal to acknowledge how white [sic] people are implicated in certain social relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination. (p. 66-67)

Whiteness, as a social construct, un-reflexively sees itself as neutral, invisible, and universal and accepts that all its institutions, behaviours, values, and discourses are normal and right. Through these “neutral” institutional practices, common sense stock of knowledge, and routinized behaviours (Jiwani, 2006), Whiteness privileges its own interpretation of reality as the only truth. This “absolute” truth, then, is used to continue sustaining and regenerating unequal power relations. Hence, this self-referential, self-regulating, and self-reproducing loop continues undisturbed.

⁹ Pseudonym

Hall (2000) frames this argument another way: “the ‘white eye [sic]’ is always outside the frame—but seeing and positioning everything within it” (p. 275). The imperialising “white eye” is the “unmarked position from which all these observations are made and from which, alone, they make sense” (p. 275). It is this normative White frame of reference that classifies and categorizes the minoritized in a social order that essentially dictates how they are viewed and treated by others and how much of the intellectual, social, and material resources they are able to access. The “white eye” is the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995) that uses, as Gabriel (1998) states, “a set of discursive techniques, including *exnomination*, that is the power not to be named; *naturalization*, through which Whiteness establishes itself as the norm by defining ‘others’ and not itself; and *universalization*, where Whiteness alone can make sense of a problem and its understanding becomes *the* understanding” (p. 13). Exnomination, naturalization, and universalization are the discursive apparatuses that the culture of power uses to hierarchize Others without challenging or disturbing its own exalted but invisible position at the top. While the culture of power remains unnamed and invisible, the minoritized are named and visible. Their differences are pathologized. Their differences are highlighted and heightened in contrast to what is considered “normal.” While “Whiteness” withdraws into its self-proclaimed normality and never questions its assumptions (Fiske, 1996), anything that threatens Whiteness—anything that is outside the worldview of Whiteness—glaringly appears in the public eye and is deliberately exoticized, vilified, pathologized, or nullified.

Linking this construct of Whiteness back to education, many White teachers, according to Banks, experience “cultural encapsulation” (cited in Weinstein, et. al. 2004;

p.29), which make them oblivious of their own cultural and racial identity. Schools, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) state, “often work in complicity with cultural reproduction, as teachers innocently operate as cultural gatekeepers who transmit dominant values and protect the common culture from the Vandals at the gates of the empire” (p. 26). It is essential, therefore, that critical multiculturalists recognize their own ethnocentrism and biases. Humbling as it may be, critical multiculturalists make explicit and investigate the evident, commonsense, and matter-of-fact—so pervasive in White middle-class thinking. Relentlessly challenging their own personal and professional assumptions and prejudices is an imperative necessary for critical multiculturalists (McKenzie et al., 2008).

In the final analysis, critical multiculturalists reject that diversity is the ultimate goal of multiculturalism; instead, they contend that difference must be legitimized within a larger goal of social justice (McLaren, 1995). By decentering race, class, and gender critical multiculturalists can increase the localizing power of the minoritized, women, and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) with the aim of eliminating human suffering and promoting egalitarianism.

Critical multiculturalism's goals to fracture systemic power imbalances, to empower the minoritized in hopes for a more socially just society, and to recognize one's own ethnocentrism and biases are, undoubtedly, laudable. However, these goals have predominately remained at the theoretical level. Many educators show that it is difficult to convert these meritorious goals into sound pedagogical practice (Kincheloe, 2007, Shields & Sayani, 2005; Sleeter & Delgado, 2004). Others such as McLaren (1995) and Wiedeman (2002) warn that critical multiculturalism has the "potential to displace

experience to the abstract. In this way, lived-experience can become devoid of power and justice that directly affect the oppressed" (Wiedeman, 2002; p. 202). Although critical multiculturalism has the potential to challenge persistent school inequities and hegemonic practices, without a relational and dialogical pedagogy that feature the lived experiences of students in the curriculum, pedagogy, and other decision making processes of the classroom, critical multiculturalism will fail to become a "transformative project" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; p. 26).

To summarize, aside from some innovative curricular and pedagogical approaches that critically examine how race, sex, gender, and class biases are produced and perpetuated (DeVillar, Faltis, & Cummins, 1994; Harrison, Smith, & Wright, 1999; Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995; Rader & Sittig, 2003; Takaki, 2001) recent dominant North American educational practices have been fashioned from the first two variants of multiculturalism (pluralist and essentialist). Of the two, pluralist multiculturalism with its focus on exoticizing diversity and tokenizing difference is still perhaps the most pervasive educational practice. The stable and unified identity construct implicit in essentialist multiculturalism, however, dominates how educators view the cultural identities of minoritized students. The third variant or critical multiculturalism has the imagination and promise to disrupt the hegemonic practices of "the culture of power" (Delpit, 1995); however, its translation to pedagogical and curricular practice has been elusory at best.

Learning and Identity

Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses or even failings, the extensive literature generated from the general concept of multiculturalism has shown the inseparability of

learning and identity (Kincheloe, 2007). Kincheloe states, “the more a teacher knows about students’ experiences, contexts, dreams, passions, and hurts, the better equipped she will be to engage them in a meaningful educational experience” (p. 32). Others have taken it one step further; they argue that to decrease failure rates and improve academic success among minoritized students, educators and educational leaders must create opportunities or spaces in their classes and schools for students to speak from the knowledge and experience that their cultural identities provide (Brown University, 2003; Calderon, 1997; Cummins, 2002, 2001, 1997, 1996, 1995; Cummins, et al., 2005; Dei, Mazzuca, & Zine, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2006, 2007; Feinberg, 1998; Ferdman, 1990; Gay, 2000, 2002; Golstein, 2007; Kincheloe, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Leistyna, 2007; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Nasir and Hand, 2006; Neuman, 1999; Nieto, 2000; Noddings, 1999; Peterson, 1998; Robins 2002; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; and Wyngaard, 2007). That is, when teachers build into their teaching their students’ diverse socio-cultural realities, prior experiences, and multiple cultural understandings, academic achievement increases (Bishop, et al., 2001; Brown University, 2003; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ferdman 1990 and others (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Calderon, 1997; Duncan-Andrade, 2005, 2006, 2007; Gay 2000, 2002; Kincheloe, 2007; Villegas et. al. 2002; and Weinstein et. al. 2004) contend that students who experience curriculum as reaffirming their identities become more engaged in the learning process. Neuman (1999), citing the work of Ladson-Billing (1994) and Delpit (1995), captures succinctly this critical notion of expanding curriculum and pedagogy to include the identities of students:

When children’s real-life experiences were legitimized and when curriculum was connected to their background knowledge, children

were capable of learning complex ideas and skills that far exceeded their reading grade level expectation. (p. 260)

Kincheloe (2007) closes this point:

John Dewey put it so well almost a century ago when he argued that all educational approaches should be constructed around the purposes of the student. By this assertion Dewey did not mean—as he has often been accused—that in a student centered curriculum that the child or the young person does whatever she wants. Instead, Dewey was concerned with teachers working with the interests of children so that they might want to learn valuable and civically useful things. When a brilliant urban teacher weaves together student interests with academic knowledges and civic issues in a way that catalyzes cognitive development and improves academic skills, it is a work of art. (p. 32-33)

As vital as teachers are to ensure that the education for all students is socially just, academically excellent, and democratic (Shields, 2003, 2007), they cannot do it alone. Educational leaders, too, are central and critical in this mandate. Since educational “leaders engage constituents in conversations regarding vision and mission (Fullan) and how they interact collaboratively in constructing communities of learners (Sergiovanni) and build positive organizational cultures (Deal & Peterson)” (English, 2005; p. xii), their sphere of influence, at every level of the school, is cardinal. Hence, in order to understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students—the second key objective of this study—I profess that an examination of the vision and structure of the educational leadership practiced in the school is necessary. Below, I review the literature of transformative educational leadership as a lens for this examination. Among other reasons, which I elaborate on below, I chose to feature transformative educational leadership because it is one of the only leadership theories that underscores the centrality of dialogue in education, and as a corollary, the identity

shaping possibilities and responsibilities that ensue when leadership intersects with education.

Transformative Educational Leadership

At the heart of school change and reform is effective educational leadership. Reforming the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) of schools is unlikely without enlightened educational leadership (Robinson, et al., 2008). During the last half of the twentieth century, many innovative and promising educational theories have emerged (Shields, 2003) as an alternative to the traditional leadership paradigm, with its roots in scientific management and modernist thinking (Foster, 1986; Dantley, 2005, Hodgkinson, 1991; Sackney & Mitchell, 2002). These emerging educational leadership theories that are fashioning a new leadership paradigm are based on the fundamental assumption that “leadership highlights the capacity of individuals to shape the world and to have a say in determining their own destiny” (Ogawa, 2005; p. 91). Unlike the modernist leadership paradigm which privileges reason at its center and emphasizes the discourse of, "order, accountability, structure, systemization, rationalization, expertise, specialization, linear development, and control" (Cherryhomes, 1988; p. 4), the new leadership paradigm negates the very concept of center and emphasizes the discourse of uncertainty, ambiguity, difference, diversity, incommensurability, and pluralism. This epistemological revolution has enabled scholars and researchers of educational administration and leadership to critically engage with axiological issues of diversity, difference, and pluralism that have for too long been silenced or pathologized by the hegemonic discourses of the positivist paradigm. In short, “traditional [educational] research,” as Heck & Hallinger (2005) state, “has too narrowly focused on administrative processes

and improvement while accepting the premises of an unjust educational system” (p. 234). *Au courant* educational leadership research, however, has become a moral enterprise (English, 2008, 2005; Furman, 2002) with an imperative to challenge primary inequities in our system (Anderson, 2004; Dantley, 2005; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008; Sackney & Mitchell, 2002; Shields, et al., 2005; Shields, 2003). By asking a rhetorical question, English (2005) emphasizes this point well: “The problem of educational leadership is that it has been thoroughly saturated with the kind of thinking that has ignored social justice ... If the schools keep reinforcing the existing social order, with its inequities and injustices perpetuated, what service has education rendered to such an unjust society?” (p. xi).

Many leadership theories from this new educational leadership paradigm organizing for education and justice abound; among them are: transformative, transformational, feminist, multicultural, democratic, critical, emancipatory (Shields, 2003) and moral or purpose-driven leadership (Dantley, 2005). For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on transformative educational leadership, a theory of leadership that Shields (2008, 2009) has further developed by drawing from multiple theories and disparate concepts. Crediting the seminal work of Freire for inspiring the ideals of transformative leadership, Shields (2009) argues that at the heart of this leadership theory are “the twin concepts of critique and possibility” (p. 5). The concept of critique—leaders confronting moral issues of schools that disproportionately benefit some students and fail others—must be balanced with the concept of possibility—leaders ensuring that hope, an “ontological need” (Freire, 2004; p. 2), lights the path of all their aims, intents, and actions—for transformative leaders to escape being “trapped in a malaise of

powerlessness” (Quantz, et al., 1991; p. 107) and believe, ardently, that change is always possible.

Elements that undergird the theory of transformative leadership include “the need for social betterment, for enhancing equity, and for a thorough reshaping of knowledge and belief structures” (Shields, 2009; p.3). She continues, transformative leadership

recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access, but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes. (p.6)

It is not enough for educational leaders to help improve the academic achievement of minoritized students, they must also ensure that all their students are critically conscious of inequities that persist in our society and that they have the necessary knowledge, abilities, and opportunities to redress these inequities. Without increasing the political, social, and cultural capital of *all* students, the hegemonic practices that have invaded and pathologized the social spaces of the disenfranchised will continue to prevail.

Two hallmarks of transformative leadership are that it is an “engaged” (Shields, 2009; p. 2) and a dialogical form of leadership. Unlike transformational leadership (Leithwood & Janzi, 1990), which it is often confused with, transformative leadership champions an activist agenda. Transformative leaders understand that education is a “terrain where power and politics are given fundamental expression” (Giroux, 1985; p. viii) and that it is precisely in this terrain—deeply engaged in the field with all the stakeholders—that leaders must advocate for those who are denied their rights of thought, belief, opinion, participation, and expression. In an era of high stakes accountability and public transparency, transformative leaders are not fearful of speaking out. They realize that they are part of the culture of power (Delpit 1995): They were educated in it and

currently work within its authority and influence. Hence, it is their responsibility to use the power apparatus they are privileged with to fight against the persistent inequities that beleaguer both schools and society.

Dialogical as opposed to hierarchical in its approach, transformative leaders orient their voices among other voices (Bakhtin, 1984) because they understand that their voices participate with other voices to represent the world. They attempt to listen and understand others even if what they hear is contrary to their own ideas, values, and beliefs. Even in the tension of disagreement or conflict, transformative leaders are fully present to the Other, aspiring to understand and learn his or her worldview and context. Shields and Edwards (2005) elaborate:

As educational leaders, we must first and foremost focus on knowing ourselves. Then, conscious of our own voice—sometimes muting it temporarily in order to hear others, sometimes silencing it altogether to set aside our positional authority and formal knowledge, we come more fully into dialogical relationship with those who live and work in our organizations. But sometimes, too, we must speak loudly and eloquently and share our insights, our understanding, and our wisdom for the good of community. Being a dialogic leader does not require losing oneself, but finding oneself in the richness of the polyphonic community. (p. 170)

Transformative leaders know when to speak and when not to speak. They understand that, sometimes, because of their position of authority, silence may be the best option to encourage others to speak. They also understand that, at other times, they have a responsibility to speak, forcefully, in a way that champions the rights, security, and dignity of the disenfranchised Others. In essence, transformative leaders believe that no individual is bequeathed with the truth. Always mindful that meanings are created in dialogue –at "an intersection of two consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 289)—they maintain that no individual can ever see the entire picture or understand the totality of

any situation. It is only when individuals share their perspectives; engage deeply, respectfully, and resolutely to understand each other; and invite the Other to enter into their worldviews that shape their perspectives, that meanings become relevant, inclusive, and wholly understood.

Let me summarize the theoretical constructs that frame this study. The first objective of this study is to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students. In order to achieve this objective, I have made four assumptions. My first assumption is that how these South Asian males students are positioned by educators and other students and how they position themselves will shape how they interpret their schooling experiences. Hence, the literature I reviewed to rationalize this assumption was how subjects are represented through discursive practices and how they are recruited and assigned positions. My second assumption is that identities have epistemic significance; in other words, how these South Asian male students understand themselves to be will have direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their worlds. I used Mohanty (1995, 2000) and Moya's (2000, 2006) postpositivist realist theory of identity to ground this assumption. My third assumption is that identity representation and construction occurs within a political and social landscape. Since multiculturalism, in recent times—particularly in North American, Antipodean, and some European societies—has been the governance discourse (Fleras, 2009) for how identities are recognized (Taylor, 1994), retained, and expressed (Kymlicka, 1997) I examined how three contemporary variants of multiculturalism (McLaren, 1995; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) are interpreted, constructed, and applied in public institutions. More specifically, I reviewed the three variations of

multiculturalism that individually or in combination have influenced how educators and educational leaders in schools will position the identities of minoritized students. The final assumption I have made in order to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students is to make explicit the inextricable link between identity and learning. The literature I reviewed argues that to decrease failure rates and improve academic success among minoritized students, educators and educational leaders must create curricular and pedagogical spaces in their schools for all students to speak from the knowledge and experiences that their identities provide.

The second objective of this study is to understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students. To achieve this objective, I claim that an examination of the vision and structure of the educational leadership practiced in the school is necessary. Hence, I reviewed the literature of transformative educational leadership as a lens for this examination.

To reiterate, I have attempted, in this chapter, to make explicit the theoretical constructs, lenses, and perspectives that will help frame and lend different ways to make meaning of the research data that I have collected and constructed. The theoretical frameworks that ground this study are disparate; I have borrowed from many different traditions. By choosing this route, I am well aware of the charges that could be leveled against this study; among others, they include: violation of discipline integrity; absences, silences, slippages, and contradictions of meanings; and diluting the episteme of the disciplines or traditions. I accept this criticism. I submit, nevertheless, no one paradigm, tradition, theory, or person can ever see, represent, or understand the totality of any situation or experience. I contend, in the spirit of Bakhtinian polyphony, that another

reasonable way to construct an interpretation of a situation or experience is by wedding together many different perspectives, frameworks, and opinions. Through this polyphonic dialogue—of theoretical constructs—a deeper understanding can emerge. It is with this hope and intent that I, too, wed together different theoretical constructs to fulfill the key objectives of this study.

I must acknowledge, however, that even when different traditions, frameworks, and voices are combined, understanding of a situation or experience will still always be insufficient, incomplete, or silent in one way or another. As Marcus (1986) aptly states, “the object of study always exceeds its analytic circumscription ... there remains the surplus of difference beyond, and perhaps because of, our circumscription” (p. 567). The circumscriptions, inclusions, and exclusions within my own writing, and how these were constructed within and because of the specific form of my investigation (Segall, 1999), form the subject of the next chapter.

3. METHODOLOGY

Of the many traditions of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), narrative inquiry, for the reasons I explain below, is the most resonant for the purposes of this study. To successfully write about the educational and schooling *experiences* of South Asian students, teachers, and educational leaders, I needed a methodology that would best represent the research participants "as complex rather than one-dimensional individuals so they are less susceptible to being read as stock types" (Kelly, 2000; p. 208). Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space* framework—which I will explain shortly—provided me with an opportunity “to capture as much as possible the openness of experience” (p. 89), “layers of complexity” (p. 97), and “the breathing, passionate being in the full stream of social life” (cited in Sclater, 2003; p. 326) that all of the participants brought to this study. It allowed me to “plumb the depths” of the rich storied lives of the participants and capture, as best as I could, their “multiple plotlines ... and multiplicity of voices” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 147). In this chapter, I describe both the process of arranging and organizing this inquiry and the methodology of the inquiry itself using the *fabula* and *sjuzet* (Bruner, 1986) of narrative.

Before moving on, let me take a brief step back and clarify the term narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin & Connelly (1994), *inquiry into narrative* is synonymous with *narrative inquiry*. Narrative, in this light, is seen both as method and phenomenon. The two authors clarify: “Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (p. 416). For ease of reference, they label the phenomenon *story* and the inquiry *narrative*. Hence,

people “lead storied lives” (p. 416) and share, with others, their stories as part of living a meaningful life. Narrative inquirers attempt to best represent the lives of others by studying and then writing about their experience.

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework is founded on the Deweyan conception of experience. According to Dewey (1961), social science research is based on the study of experience. In *Education and Experience*, Dewey (1998) elaborates on this point and argues that education, experience, and life are intricately linked (developed further in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). We understand more about education by thinking about life and we learn more about life by thinking about education. The experience of studying life and education, *as* experience, is one of the precepts of schools (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Perhaps Robert Redfield, the anthropologist, said it the best: “If I choose a few words to describe the endless act of creation that is education, I should choose these: Education is a conversation about the meaning of life, as each sees some part of it, on behalf of everyone” (cited in Coulter & Weins, 2008). “When one asks what it means to study education,” Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advance Dewey’s thinking, “the answer—in its most general sense—is to study experience” (p. xxiii- xxiv).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and others (Conle, 2005, 2001, 2000, 1999; Conle & deBeyer, 2009; Freeman, 2003; Phillon, et al., 2005; Riessman, 1993), narrative is an ideal way of comprehending and representing experience. “Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (p. 18). They

continue, "Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, education experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19).

Before explaining Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework, let me develop further this relationship between experience and narrative. Geertz (1957) in *Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols* states that a human being "cannot live in a world it is unable to understand." He continues, "The drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and as pressing as the more familiar biological needs." Fulford (1999) and others (Bruner, 1987; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, 1994) argue that it is the narrative form of understanding that is the most powerful way to provide this structure and order to experience. Citing the research of Turner, a neuro-scientist, Fulford (1999) claims

Stories are the building blocks of human thought; they are the way the brain organizes itself ... We pull together fragments and find meaning by connecting many elements. And the force that sets the neurons firing and makes these connections possible is narrative—in particular, stories that are blended with other stories. When we compare one story we know with another, we are assembling the elements that make our brains work." (p.83)

This is the omnipotent structuring force of narrative: The capacity and facility to create meaning out of an ostensibly desultory set of experiences. We think in storied form; our brains, according to Bruner (1987), Fulford (1999), and Greenhalgh, T. et al., (1999) are organized in this narrative way. Doris Lessing extends this thought: "We value narrative because the pattern is in our brains. Our brains are patterned for storytelling, for the consecutive" (cited in Fulford, 1999; p. 113). Widdershoven is direct and explicit: "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe,

doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (cited in Greenhalgh, T. et al., 1999).

Andrews (2000), Bruner (1987), Conle (2005, 2000), Eakin (1999), Fulford (1999), Holstein and Gubrium (1999), Leggo (1995, 1999), McAdams (1997), and Sclater (2003), deepen the relationship between experience and narrative by claiming that narratives not only structure our experiences, but more importantly, *make* who we are. Sclater (2003) is precise: "Narratives not only help us to organize and make sense of experience, and not only help us imbue our lives with meaning, but in these very acts of meaning-making, the human subject sculpts a narrative identity" (p. 318). In other words, narrative, as an epistemological framework, helps shape our identities. Quoting Andrews, Sclater (2003) lucidly summarizes this position:

Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences ... they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves ... We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell. (p. 317-318)

From this vantage point we can see that it is through narratives that we are able to read our experiences in order to make sense of who we are. Crites (1971), Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1994), Freeman and Combs (1996), Fulford (1999), and Carmen Shields (2005) advance this notion of narrative as epistemology. Crite (1971) asserts that our sense of self is created through our secret and sacred stories. Our images of ourselves, our entire existence depends on these stories. He states, "These stories are dwelling places. People live in them" (p. 295). These dwelling places that we are intended to live in give us a script, a voice. When we speak, we speak from our stories. MacIntyre elaborates, "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words ... There is no way to give us an understanding of any society,

including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources" (cited in Fulford, 1999; p. 33).

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

This narrative inquiry framework, as I have already noted, is founded on the Deweyan notion of experience. Dewey claimed that in order to study an experience, one must simultaneously be aware of three "directions": *interaction, continuity, and situation* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Building on this notion, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use these three directions to label the three-dimensions of their narrative inquiry space. Interaction, they define as *personal* and *social*. Continuity, they claim refers to the temporal direction of a situation; that is, the *past, present, and future*. And by situation, they refer to the groundedness of *place*. Hence, these three directions create a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with place along one dimension; personal and social interaction along the second dimension; and temporality along the third dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, any narrative inquiry, according to these two authors, can be defined by this three-dimensional framework.

This inquiry was no exception. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework certainly defined and guided my methodology. Throughout this dissertation, I use this framework and my reflexive voice to ground my narratives and analysis in the three-dimensional narrative space of interaction, continuity, and situation.

Process

Preliminary conversations were held with the Rowling school district personnel responsible for refereeing and approving research studies conducted in their schools. Upon receiving my formal research proposal, the school district committee adjudicated

and approved my inquiry with no revisions. In my proposal, I requested to conduct my research in one of the two schools in the district that had the highest enrollment of South Asian students. When my first choice—Montclair High School—was granted, I immediately met with the school’s educational leaders to discuss the details and parameters of the inquiry. In that meeting, we discussed, among other issues, the course area, grade level, and profile of teachers I wanted to specifically focus on. A grade ten or eleven social studies class (a humanities course) was unanimously identified as the most appropriate subject area for this inquiry. The teacher profile warranted a lengthy discussion, which at all times was dialogical, respectful, and accommodating. I presented four criteria for their consideration: a teacher (a) who had been teaching social studies for at least five years but not longer than fifteen years; (b) who had been teaching at Montclair High School for no less than four years; (c) with Humanities content expertise and (d) open to the merits of qualitative educational research and polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). Quickly agreeing to these criteria, all three of them wanted to know how I defined an “excellent” and “successful” teacher; they had two potential teachers in mind for the study and wanted to ensure that their decision would be most beneficial for me and the research. I enumerated and briefly explained the characteristics of a critical multicultural educator; someone who was (1) socio-culturally conscious; (2) recognized his/her own ethnocentrism and biases; and (3) possessed an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds. After considerable dialogue, especially around the criterion of socio-cultural consciousness—which one educational leader, in a later conversation with me, passionately argued was “leftist intellectual rhetoric” and “precisely the reason why our [educational] system is in need of values education to

strengthen our understanding of what it means to be Canadian”—the three leaders in attendance asked me for a few minutes of privacy so that they could consult with each other and arrive at a mutually agreeable decision. Approximately half an hour later, I was introduced to Mr. Parker Coulter who would be the social studies teacher of the grade eleven class I would be observing over the next several months. Parker had been teaching for a total of fifteen years in the Rowling school district and for ten consecutive years at Montclair High School. Not only was he an extremely well regarded colleague in the school and school district, he was very much liked and respected by the majority of his students.

Parker and I had known each other, as educators, for thirteen years. We had a history together. Having taught in the same school district and the same content area for many years, we had encountered each other many times. Each of us, in the school district, was regarded as a highly competent and driven educator. We had contributed to many think-tank discussions and separately led many professional development workshops for our school district. The leadership at the school did not know of our working relationship when they decided Parker would be their first choice for the research I was about to lead. They did not know that, as educators, we regarded each other very highly. They did not know—which Parker and I also found out later—that, over the years, we had regularly used each other’s curricular ideas in our classes. They did not know, either, that thirteen years before, we had each applied for a coveted position, as teacher-scholar, for a special curriculum research project led by the collaborative efforts of the British Columbia Ministry of Education, the University of British Columbia, the American Council of Learned Societies, and our school district. One of us got the position and the other did

not. The one who had been unsuccessful, four years later, in a private exchange insulted the other with a comment that over the next eight years remained unspoken, unresolved, and very swollen. Knowing, without a doubt, that we would both have to attend to this matter eventually, we did not let this swelling impede our excitement to share in a rare educational encounter. Smiling at each other while holding a heart full of feelings in reserve, the two of us leaned over his class lists and considered, together, which one of his five classes was the best suited for this inquiry. The boil would be lanced and the two hearts assayed weeks later.

Parker chose one of his two grade eleven social studies classes for the study. His reasons were: (a) the class had the highest number and attendance of South Asian male students out of all his social studies classes he taught that year; (b) a higher percent of the South Asian male students who attended this class, he believed, would agree to participate in this inquiry and, in particular, the one-on-one interviews that I wanted to conduct; and (c) he had a preparation block immediately after this class so if we needed to debrief or discuss any of my observations, we could do so during that time.

Classroom Observations

Once I provided the grade eleven social studies class with an overview of my study and received their signed assent forms and signed consent forms from their parents/guardians, I began observing the class of thirty students from a seat at the back of the classroom next to Parker's desk. From there, I actively observed the constellations of interactions, relationships, and life happenings that occurred in every class for the next eight months, two to three times a week (depending on the rotating school timetable). My two explicit objectives for the classroom observations, as delineated in detail in Chapter

1, were: First, to understand South Asian male students' school experiences and second, to understand how Parker understood and related to all his students and, in particular, to his South Asian male students. The eight months of being in the field, class after class, certainly granted me deep insight and perspective to ably examine these explicit objectives, which I will elaborate on in subsequent chapters; however, it was another effect of these observations—that up until then I had only read about—that truly taught me, emotionally as well as intellectually, what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe as the multi-faceted nature of narrative inquiry: “... narrative inquiry is much more than ‘look for and hear story’. Narrative inquiry in the field is a form of living, a way of life” (p. 78). It is planting myself in the very soil of the research field that gives rise to part of the storied lives of the participants. It is from this vantage point, I, as a narrative inquirer, began to understand—to some degree—why the students at Montclair High School said what they said in their interviews with me; why they behaved and spoke a certain way in their classes; and why they positioned themselves and allowed others to position them in specific ways when they were out in the public eye of the school milieu. Without this day-to-day context, without becoming part of the classroom and school landscape for a considerable length of time, I wouldn’t have been

a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment and show up in what appears to the new and inexperienced eyes of the researcher as mysterious code (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 77).

It was settling in and living alongside the students and teachers that allowed me to experience not only what could be seen and spoken about explicitly, but also the events and subtleties not spoken about and not done.

My observations were not just restricted to Parker's classroom. At least once a week for eight months, I positioned myself in visible¹⁰ social spaces inside and outside of the school. The majority of the time I spent in the rotunda, the large social space on the first floor of the school, where most of the students ate their lunch and socialized. Whenever possible, I, coffee or lunch in hand, also sat at a table or desk in the hallways of various "wings" or sections of the school during lunch times, recess, or afterschool. Additionally, I sat on a bench, under a tree, or on a concrete ledge of a flower bed, to observe various groups of students that congregated regularly in a specific location outside of the school. Positioning myself in these varied social milieus of the school allowed me to initiate many informal discussions with both students and teachers. Most of these conversations occurred spontaneously and unsolicited leading to many natural, casual, and informal opportunities where I learned, and even experienced, the on-the-ground realities of the students at Montclair High School.

To do this well, I had to constantly dismantle, with fierce vigilance, my old optics of the "taken-for-grantedness" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 78). That is, I had to look beyond what I expected or, perhaps even wanted, to see. I had to look at the students' lives and teachers' lives as best as I could by minimizing or, at least, recognizing the filters of my expected assumptions. I had to re-learn how to look at my surroundings and re-awaken my sense of perception and wonder (Van Manen, 1990 and Merleau-Ponty, 1962). All my observations had to be seen anew, with an unadulterated desire to wonder, understand, and learn. I do not think, however, I was able to do so in a way that Van

¹⁰ I did not hide or "pretend" to observe the South Asian boys in an "objective" way. However, I wasn't intrusive either, placing myself in the midst of their interactions. I was unobtrusive but visible for all to know that I was present in their social milieu. They were all aware that the objective of my presence was to conduct research.

Manen (1990) describes researching the “lifeworld” of his participants: Studying their “world as we experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (p.9). I do not think I apprehended the essence and meaning of the participants’ everyday experiences without theorizing, taxonomizing, or abstracting their experiences (Van Manen, 1990). In fact, I observed *by* interpreting. As I observed, I immediately interpreted to make sense of what I saw and experienced. By the very act of observing—and at times participating—I interpreted my surroundings, my participants, according to my established meaning-systems. Despite aspiring to and practicing open-mindedness and reflexivity, I could not help but frame events, infer, and attach meanings to the participants’ behaviours, intimations, and actions using my own epistemological and embodied frameworks. As an observer or inquirer, I do not think it is possible to step outside of myself to examine my participants in cold objective light. As many have written (Schwandt, 2007; Evers & Wu, 2006), there cannot be an inseparability of subject and object in research endeavors or, for that matter, in human relations. I am inevitably linked to my participants through my own interpretation. I can only see, understand, and represent my participants through my interpretative systems. Conle (2005) elaborates:

I am always an interpreter because I cannot rid myself of my personal history, nor can I step out of the world in which I live when I confront whatever objects I chose to explore. Interpretations permeate perception, inquiry, and representation. (p. 203)

This does not mean, however, that I am saddled to my own interpretation and can only represent my observations of others through my own meaning systems. No; checks and balances are possible and, in fact, essential to ensure narrative integrity. Not all interpretations of events are equally valid; there are certainly better and poorer

interpretations of experiences. Narrative relativism, as this tension is often labeled, is a major criticism leveled against narrative inquirers.

Complicity

I must briefly examine two corollary thoughts. First, it is not only my interpretations that link me to the participants whom I am observing, and at times interacting with. I am, in fact, complicit in the very world that I am studying. My very presence in the field changes the dynamic of the field. I am not a disembodied recorder of my participants' experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By looking, looking away, reacting, and not reacting, I am changing the nature of the inquiry field. The participants' awareness of my presence changes their positioning and, more importantly, their awareness of themselves. Sartre (1969), in *Being and Nothingness*, describes this point majestically. "The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are is a pure reference to myself" (p. 259). Sartre explains by sharing an example. He states that if you are looking at someone through a keyhole, ostensibly in private, that act would be as close to losing yourself completely as you could experience. Fueled by your motivation for peeping, you are absorbed fully in the experience of what you are observing. In this state, you are minimally aware or not at all aware of yourself. It is both your desire for and act of peeping that have completely consumed you. If, however, you hear footsteps or worse, realize that another individual is looking at you, a fundamental change occurs in you. You are suddenly hurled into full consciousness of yourself. The Other's look exposes you. A moment earlier, looking through the keyhole, you were in a state of "unreflective consciousness" (Van Manen, 1990; p. 25); now you *see* yourself

because *somebody* sees you (Van Manen, 1990). Your awareness and, possibly even your behaviours and actions, change because you are now fixed by the gaze of the Other.

Similarly, my look, as an inquirer, changes the degree of awareness of my participant. He becomes aware of himself because of my awareness of him. He is conscious of his presence not so much as it is for himself but “as it is *for the Other*” [italics in original] (Sartre as quoted in Van Manen, 1990; p. 25). Sartre explains:

We often say that the shy man is ‘embarrassed by his own body’. Actually this expression is incorrect; I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it is for the Other which may embarrass me. (Van Manen, 1990; p. 25)

To summarize, I am very aware that my presence in the inquiry field affected, in some way, my participants’ attitudes, behaviours, and actions. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) clarify: “It can perhaps be seen more clearly that we are shaping the parade of events as we study the parade” (p. 87). My gaze made them aware, to some degree, of themselves being watched. They were conscious of their own presence because of my gaze. Whether and how their behaviours, attitudes, and actions would have been different had I not been present is hard to know or evince. The few occasions that I do know how my presence affected my participants, I will explicate in the subsequent chapters of this inquiry.

My Own Stories in the Background

We relive stories and see ourselves only as the watcher or listener, the drummer in the background keeping cadence. (Ondaatje, 2007; p.158)

Second, as a narrative inquirer, I must acknowledge the centrality of my own experiences. In the field, I am not only working with the participants, but I am working with myself. I become visible in the inquiry with my own lived and told stories

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is not only the experiences and stories of the participants that “occupy” the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, but my own life, life-tellings, and re-tellings that also fill this space. My storied life very much commingles with the storied lives of my participants. There exists in this space many layered narrative threads. Sometimes these stories surface from somewhere within us and catch us off guard. Other times, they illuminate a part of the dominant story that otherwise would remain dark or hidden. Whatever the case, they, “like a persistent song playing in my mind, surface repeatedly” (Carger, 2005; p. 240). Submerged somewhere in our being, they rise in partial or full view, realized only because of our participation in the inquiry field. It is a priority, then, as I compose the narratives of my participants, that I also compose my own narratives. They, too, are central to this narrative inquiry. Hence, my own narrative threads, as will become evident in subsequent chapters, will lace intimately with the narrative threads of my participants (Carger, 2005; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ely, 2007). Perhaps, “the drummer in the background” that Michael Ondaatje (2007) refers to in the above quote from *Divisadero* suggests that our own narrative threads must be heard in the background of all the stories we tell, especially if we are to ensure narrative “cadence.” Nevertheless, by including my own narratives, it is one of my many hopes that you, the reader, can begin to appreciate the depth, breadth, and complexity of my multi-storied inquiry field.

Interviews

As I stated in my research and ethics proposal, my intention was to interview only the South Asian male students—estimated at about twelve to fifteen—who were enrolled in the social studies class that I would be observing over several months. This intention

was questioned by my committee members who caringly warned me that the number of possible interviews would be too large to complete within a reasonable amount of time, especially given that I also had to interview two of the four educational leaders of the school and the social studies classroom teacher. Respecting their advice, I narrowed the number of students I intended to interview to a total of five. After beginning my inquiry and observing the class for a mere week, I quickly realized that not only did I need to interview all of the South Asian male and female students enrolled in the class—which numbered eighteen in total—but I had to interview a few of the other non-South Asian students in the classroom as well. To effectively understand the school experiences of South Asian students and how educators understand and relate to their South Asian students, I believed strongly that it was essential for me to also hear and understand the perspectives of several South Asian female students and non-South Asian students, who could provide me with alternative perspectives. Identity, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, should be thought of “as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within not outside of presentation” (Hall, 1990; p. 51). Furthermore, “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves” (p. 52). Firmly grounded in this poststructural conception of identity construction, I believed it was important to discern how other students in the classroom positioned the identities of their male South Asian peers and how they viewed the relationship between the classroom teacher and these same male South Asian male students.

A burgeoning number of student interviews was not the only cause of my prolonged work in the field; other South Asian students in the school who heard about

my inquiry also came forward and volunteered to be interviewed. Additionally, during my interviews with all four educational leaders of the school—not two as I originally planned—and the social studies classroom teacher, all five of them suggested, at various times of their interviews, the names of colleagues who they believed would offer me valuable insight into this inquiry. Although I was absolutely overwhelmed with the number of interviews I had already scheduled, I decided to pursue their leads. By the end of the eight month inquiry, I had formally interviewed forty-five grade eleven and twelve students, four school and teacher leaders, and twelve classroom teachers. By pursuing and, subsequently, fulfilling this mammoth and perhaps extravagant aspiration, my two month time frame reserved for conducting interviews protracted into an unwieldy eight months. The additional six months were not the only consequence; I now had to spend additional time transcribing, reviewing, re-transcribing and waiting to receive approval for the final interview text from these additional interviewees. Nonetheless, these additional conversations further contributed to, and at times edified, the already large number of worldviews and perspectives that are braided through the polyphonic (Bakhtin, 1984) nature of this text.

Conversations

In total, I had the pleasure of conducting sixty-one formal and countless informal conversations with the participants in this study. Unquestioningly, each one of these conversations carried a universe of meaning (Edwards, 2007). All of the conversations were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix 1), which I did not use in a systematic and rigid manner, but in a way that allowed the participants to share their experiences freely and on their own terms. They decided what to share, how much to

share, and when to share it. My intention was not necessarily to collect facts, where the focus is on asking the right questions; instead it was on interaction, where the focus is on the process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In other words, my interview—which was closer to a conversation—was more than a static triad of sender, message, and receiver. Invoking Bakhtin (1984) yet again, the “message” in our conversation was fluid and evolving, formulated and formulating as a result of what I had said, what my participant had said, and the anticipation of what we both would or would not say. Through our dialogue, we co-authored meanings that did not belong to me nor my participant but “inhere[d] within an ideal third category, in which the word and intention of each [were] intermeshed but transcended” (Danow, 1991; p. 65). Sometimes the meanings took the form of shared stories, anecdotes, or musings; other times, they took the shape of testimonials, disclosures, or confessions. Whatever the form, however, each one was born in dialogue where the emerging meanings occurred at “an intersection of two consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 289). Meanings that erupted, in whatever form, were a result of the specific dialogue with my participant. Were my participants communicating with another interviewer, that message would be undoubtedly formulated and enunciated differently (Bakhtin, 1984; Danow, 1991).

Not all my conversations with my participants were, however, heartfelt, emancipatory, and “Buberian.” Despite my sentience, some were stilted and angular; each word squeezed painfully from a gossamer of suspicion or dubiety. No matter how much I was present, in my entirety, to the *Thou* (Buber, 1970), the *Thou*, or my participant, did not make himself present to me. In most of these cases, it was evident that we had not adequately developed a relationship of mutual trust. This is not to say that I

necessarily had developed a deep and trusting relationship with the participants with whom I did have an open and participatory dialogue. With each of my participants, I shared a different web of relations. Each web had a different architecture of trust, suspicion, care, candor, probity, and the like. Indeed, with each web or relationship, I entered respectfully and built carefully the confidence and trust that were required to share meanings together. I was very cognizant that each participant spoke to me differently and in order to support the integrity of these differences, I questioned, responded, and commented, as best as I could, using his or her specific terms of reference and frames of thinking. By doing this, I honored and validated the particularity of the meanings and frames each participant wanted to share and use with me (Edwards, 2007). Additionally, at the beginning of all my interviews, I began by sharing either an encouraging observation that I may have made of them or a compliment about a skill, attitude, or competence that they may have displayed at some point in my classroom or school observations. All of these varied yet genuine attempts at building and developing trust with my participants, I strongly believe, helped dilate and deepen the dialogue I experienced with them.

Conversations: A Site of Articulation and Legitimacy

For some of my participants, however, my dialogue was emancipatory and helped legitimate many of their unspoken and unexamined feelings and thoughts. Let me explain this point by inviting the voices of two South Asian male students. First, Nav shares his thoughts. Next, Taran, a recent immigrant, who despite struggling with the English language, bravely pieces together his ideas. To retain the authentic spirit of his insight, I chose not to grammatically correct Taran's voice or change his words into a narrative.

Nav

Anish: Thank you so much for spending the time with me, Nav. Not only did you push my thinking about this research, you challenged me to think differently. What you shared with me, all your stories, has really made my research strong.

Nav: No worries. Can I say something else?

Anish: Absolutely; you can say anything you want...

Nav: It's just that I thought the interview was over when you turned the tape recorder off. Anyways, it really isn't about your research.

Anish: Not an issue, Nav, tell me what's on your mind? It doesn't have to be about my research. Can I turn on the tape recorder or do you want it off?

Nav: Sure.

Anish: Turn it on?

Nav: Sorry, yes.

[Long pause] I think by talking to you and mainly because of your deep questions [laughs]—Mr. Coulter was right about you, you do ask deep questions [laughs]—you made me think about these issues like I never thought about them before. It's like you made my worries and angers—mostly my angers—real. A lot of times, I thought I was imagining things or like that I was making a big deal of things, you know? I thought that stuff was unfair or it shouldn't be like that. But after talking to you, it's like you understand. You kinda understand what is, like, unfair in this school. It's not just in my mind.

Anish: This is very important Nav. Say more.

Nav: Silence.

Anish: So, you feel that by speaking with me, many of your school experiences that you thought you were imagining were actually real; that what you were feeling were [sic] real?

Nav: Well, not school experiences but experiences with teachers.

Anish: Oh, ok, sorry. Your experiences with teachers.

Nav: Yes.

Taran

I liked to speak to you on Friday. Thank you. What you are doing for us, Indo-Canadian people, is very good. I never spoken to anybody about prejudist and culture things before. I was feeling it very much inside me but who can you speak it to? When I speak to you, you understand what I try to say. You look serious when I was speaking and I became scared but I think, yes, he is serious because this is about serious things. What I say is serious ... I'm happy that you are smart and that you can tell the teachers and government something about our people. I don't know words like you but when I speak with you, you teach me how to say things in my head that I didn't know how to say before.

Nav and Taran were not the only two students to share with me how the interview site became both a legitimatizing experience for their unspoken and unexamined feelings and an opportunity to help them begin to articulate some of these feelings, experiences, and intuitions. Many other students—and two of the twelve teachers interviewed—articulated similar sentiments. The very act of participating in this inquiry provided these participants—and possibly even other participants who did not provide me with feedback—with an opportunity to examine and reflect on experiences that they did not necessarily know how to process or even whether they should process. They began to attach (different) meanings to experiences that either befuddled them or that they considered, for whatever reason, illegitimate. The to and fro of the dialogue with me helped the participant look inside himself through the eyes of another (Bakhtin, 1984). As Bakhtin claims: “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another” (p. 287). The dialogical nature of the interviews provided the participants with “opportunities to tell their stories, reflect on their stories, and learn from their stories” (Coulter et al., 2007; p.

114). There are, however, two other features to my narrative inquiry methodology that require closer examination. The first is the “insider” role of the interviewer that possibly diminishes the power differential that inevitably occurs between the participants and the researcher. The second is what Duncan-Andrade (2006, 2007) labels *cariño*.

Insider

The literature on insider research (Chavez, 2008) has proliferated dramatically during the latter part of the twentieth century (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Chavez, 2008, Kacen & Chaitin, 2006; Kanuha, 2000; Kusow, 2003; Labaree, 2002; Merriam et al., 2001; Narayan, 1993; Parameswaran, 2001; Sherif, 2001). Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a literature review of this scholarship, I will, for the purpose of establishing a context to my methodology and findings highlight a few key principles. Banks’ (1998) “typology of cross-cultural researchers” (p. 8) is oft-quoted in insider literature. He identifies four types of researchers: The indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external-outsider. He places these four types of researchers along a continuum of closeness to the indigenous community that is being researched. The indigenous-insider, according to Banks (1998), is the closest insider. He defines the indigenous-insider as an

Individual [who] endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it. (p. 8)

The external-outsider according to Banks (1998) is considered the most distant. He defines this type of researcher as an individual who

is socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research. The external-outsider has a partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspectives, and knowledge of the

community he or she is studying and consequently often misunderstands and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community. (p. 8)

He warns that

the external-outsider may violate the integrity of the communities he or she studies, his or her work may contribute to the disempowerment and oppression of these communities, and it may be used by policymakers to justify the marginalized positions of the indigenous people in the studied community. (p. 8)

The two other researcher profiles in the middle of Bank's (1998) continuum, in order of closeness to the "insider" role, are the indigenous-outsider and external-insider.

Tidy and formulaic in its conception, Banks' (1998) linear continuum, however, does not consider or examine the complexity of the researcher's insider and/or outsider identity (Chavez, 2008; Naples, 1998). According to Naples (1998), Chavez (2008), Parameswaran (2001), Brayboy and Deyhle, (2000) and others, the researcher's insider and/or outsider identities are not fixed and stable; rather, they are, as I examined in the discussion of identity in Chapter 2, fluid, contradictory, and serialized. All insider and outsider researchers experience events differently. Because the epistemologies through which these researchers interpret their experiences vary, one can conclude that the researchers' interpretations of the same event, too, can vary (Moya, 2000). Hence, "a participant may draw us near as a member of the ingroup, but in the next moment, because of a social difference (gender, class, age, region), may distance herself from the researcher" (Chavez, 2008; p. 478). That is, advantages and privileges of an insider can change, sometimes dramatically, depending on the social locations and shared experiences of the participants and researcher (Larabee, 2002).

In spite of the heterogeneity of identities among insiders, there are many appreciable methodological advantages that insiders procure during their research process

(Chavez, 2008, Banks, 1998). Chavez (2008) summarizes many of these advantages—and complications—of this insider status in a useful table. I have replicated part of the table in Appendix 2. Below, I comment on six of these advantages.

My South Asian background and brown skin provided me with immediate legitimacy with the teachers, school administrators, South Asian students, and non-South Asian students. Despite the valid critique associated with these identity markers, which I examined in Chapter 1, I was seen as an insider with a “legitimate” South Asian male identity by these participants. Equally, with the cachet of these two identity markers and the working knowledge of four Indian languages and dialects, it was much easier for me, as a researcher, to access the social groups—both public and private—of the male South Asian boys. Additionally, my refugee and immigrant experience allowed me to enrich and nuance many of my conversations with participants who were experiencing the angst of alienation, prejudice, and disenfranchisement because of their own immigrant experiences. In some cases, by sharing an anecdote or personal experience or by asking a question that could only be asked by someone who has experienced the corrugations of refugee life, evoked, in the participant, a torrent of hurt, confusion, and anger. The stories that were born from these conversations, I do not believe, would have even been conceived if I subscribed directly to my interview protocol and had not disclosed part of my own location or identity in the interviews. hooks (1990, 1995), Jiwani (2006), Lather (1991) and others would contend, and rightly so, that my interview methodology embraced a post-colonial framework where I was also able to diminish the power differential that inevitably occurs between the researcher and researched; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, I choose to position this point within the permeable

circumference of insider scholarship. Additionally, in formal or informal conversations, I used my insider status to gently push deeper a participant's thinking or clichéd response; further interrogate, with care and respect, a participant's motivation; or offer language to a participant's inchoate thoughts or feelings. My ability to detect the non-verbal cues, behaviours, and perceptions of both the South Asian male and female students—however problematic and unsophisticated this practice or art form—helped provide me with nuanced, complicated, and multilayered observations, interpretations, and representations. To sum up, as an insider, I was privy to the rich inner lives (Greene, 1971) of many of my participants. This privilege allowed me to glance into the complexity, mystery, and paradox that constituted the very building blocks of many of their experiences. The stories that follow in the subsequent chapters attempt to hint at this complexity, mystery, and paradox but, in the end, despite the multi-layered meanings they evoke and/or invoke, they are but impoverished versions of the participants' "lifeworlds" (Van Manen, 1990).

Cariño

Duncan-Andrade (2006, 2007) drawing from the work of Angela Valenzuela, advocates for the concept of *cariño* or caring, love, or affection, in research methodologies. He distinguishes between aesthetic caring—which he interprets as “an attention to things and ideas ... that leads to a culture of false caring, one where the most powerful members of the relationship define themselves as caring despite the fact that the recipients of their so-called caring do not perceive it as such” (p. 451)—from authentic caring—which he interprets as “a reciprocal relationship whereby children are authentically cared for and, in turn, open themselves up to care about the school” (p.

451). Most schools, he claims, are structured around aesthetic caring but should ideally be built on authentic caring or *cariño*. Applying *cariño* to research methodology, he posits, is an opportunity for educators to “democratize the tools of research and knowledge creation ...[by] empowering individuals as agents of meaningful, sustainable change ... [and] to positively impact the material conditions of those involved with the study” (p. 455). I refer to and employ the concept of *cariño* in my methodology not because I believe I directly improved the material conditions or quality of life of the students I researched; instead, I use the concept to describe the virtues of critical awareness, empowerment, and hope that many of my South Asian student and teacher participants felt after their formal and informal conversations with me. Several participants shared with me that after our conversations, they were more cognizant of some school or teacher practices that they previously felt disturbed about, but did not quite know how to formulate or articulate. These same participants felt a sense of empowerment, not necessarily because they could change school or teacher practices that they felt were unjust, but because they now knew, after conversations with me, that what disturbed them about certain school or teacher practices might, in fact, be valid or legitimate. By sharing their thoughts and feelings with me—many of them incipient and forming—they felt a sense of relief and, at times, hope. One South Asian girl, Manjit, captured this sentiment well. After interviewing with me for one and half hours, she shared the following as she left the room:

Manjit: It was real nice talking to you ... I kind of feel good about things right now. I'm realizing that maybe I'm not crazy and paranoid, you know? ... Sometimes I think that lots of things that go on in school is sooo [emphasis] unfair. My friends just think that I'm psycho or delusional [looks at me for reassurance].

Anish: [I shake my head in disagreement] No, you certainly are not Manjit.

Manjit: They'll tell me it's just in your head, get over it. You think way too much. But I can just know, I can just feel it that what happened there wasn't right. I could never prove it or even speak about it ... Now I know that prejudice isn't just about the color of your skin. It is also hidden, like you said. It can happen right in front of you but most people will not even notice it ... I have to look at things that are normal and ask myself if it is right? Does it have to be that way? You called *that* [emphasis] power. I like that. No one's ever told me that. No one's told me that I can have that power.

Manjit met with me two more times; one time to approve her interview transcription, which should have taken ten minutes but instead took well over forty-five minutes.

Another time, she saw me observing in the school rotunda and began chatting with me about my observations. During both of these times, she thanked me for, as she said:

“giving me words that allowed me to see better.”

Indeed, *cariño* practiced by researchers, Duncan-Andrade (2006) asserts, provides “a sense of hope and promise, one that is directly tied to the individual actors’ sense of themselves as capable change agents” (p. 455). Manjit and several other participants in this inquiry, I believe, felt this *cariño* when speaking with me. I am uncertain if the approach to my research gave more to the participants than I received (Duncan-Andrade, 2006) but I do know, from the feedback I was fortunate to receive, that our formal and informal conversations empowered them in many ways.

Location of Interviews and Tape Recorder

All student interviews were conducted at Montclair High School in a small see-through but quiet seminar room located in the Humanities wing. All interviews were

conducted individually during lunch, after school, or student preparation times¹¹. All of the teacher interviews were conducted in their own classroom either afterschool or during their preparation time. All four of the school administrators' interviews were conducted in their respective school offices. All the interviews were tape recorded unless requested otherwise. Three students requested, just before their interviews, they did not want their interviews recorded. Each of their requests was honored without verbal or non-verbal hesitation.

Transcriptions

I transcribed each one of the fifty-eight formal interviews I had tape recorded. For the other three, who declined to be recorded, I summarized notes, which I submitted to them for approval. Although an onerous and time consuming task, I consciously chose to transcribe the interviews myself for two main reasons. First, by listening to the voice and context of each participant, I was able to recall as much of our dialogue as possible, which I added to the transcription in the form of notes, comments, and questions. Second, and perhaps most important, transcription text, without the élan vital of the dialogical exchange, can be one-dimensional and flat. Since meanings between two individuals are exchanged in myriad ways, even the most sedulous and precise transcriptions can only convey a sliver of the entire meaning. In the blind spot of the transcribed text are hidden the fragrance and prickles of voice, conjecturing eyes, extinguished smiles, inventing brows, and cartography of the body. While typing each word of the conversation, I added in the margins and parenthesis, the accompanying valences of meanings. Despite the

¹¹ Some grade eleven or twelve students who had completed or were in the process of completing all their graduate requirement courses could apply for a study block, which was used to complete homework or to study for exams.

rigor and scope of my intent, the interview transcript with the additional arms of meanings still remained a bloodless facsimile of the initial conversation.

Each of the fifty-eight, out of sixty-one, participants was provided with a transcript of the interview. Embedded in the text were my observations and notes of participant's body language, smiles, glances, and purposive silences. Included also were my notes, where applicable, clarifying or making explicit the context of the conversation. I did not include, however, my interpretative notes. I sought revisions, reflections, and approval from each participant. Each participant was given an opportunity either to meet with me for a follow-up interview to discuss his or her revisions and reflections or to send me a soft copy of his or her revisions, reflections, and approval of the interview text by email. The email option was only provided to students who shared with me their email addresses. For three students who did not share with me their email addresses, I provided them with a hard copy of their interview transcript. Ten students chose to meet with me for a follow-up conversation. Eleven other students emailed me their approvals; of these eleven, only two added minor reflections to their transcripts. Despite two reminders—one verbal and the other written—twenty-one students did not follow-up with me after their interview. Two of the twelve teachers followed up with me for a second interview. The other ten teachers sent me their approvals by email seeking minimal to no revisions to their interview text. None of the twelve teachers added reflective comments to his or her transcripts. All four teacher and school leaders emailed me their approvals by email. Only one school leader made moderate revisions to his transcription text; the other three made minor changes. None of the four school leaders added reflective comments to his or her transcripts.

From Field Texts to Research Texts

After reading and re-reading each interview transcript, observation field texts, and my personal reflections several times, I began narratively coding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) the emerging themes. These themes included, but were more than, the repeating words and ideas, patterns, motifs, and coalescing meanings; they were very much narrative in nature. That is, the themes began to cohere around narrative devices such as character, plot, tension, scene, context, tone, and voice. For example, as I read and re-read my field texts, storylines began to weave, unravel, and reweave; tensions ebbed and flowed depending on the profile and nature of the characters; time and space—unmistakable at first blush—began to blur and collapse; and interstices and silences, concealed within speech, began to precipitate. Perhaps most astonishing was that the consistencies and contradictions that pervaded my field notes, began to rest side-by-side, now not necessarily antagonizing each other but, instead, wanting to understand each other. I recorded, by hand, these themes, subthemes, quotations, ironies, and inconsistencies. When my interview sheets, post-its, index cards, chart paper, and paper strips migrated from my study into my son's bedroom, I had no alternative but to transfer this information into digital form. *Microsoft Excel*[®] became the incubator for all this hatching, growing, and decaying narrative matter. The vast beehive of spreadsheets strengthened my ability to, among other things, efficiently manage details, interconnect narrative threads, and juxtapose ostensibly opposing themes. As I synthesized the field notes, I did so in recursive loops; moving from field notes to the developing plot while constantly checking, comparing, and testing the story with the field notes, the field notes with the themes, and the themes with the story (Coulter et al., 2007, Polkinghorne, 1995).

Each of the plotlines was checked and cross-checked against the developing stories. These negotiations continued from the beginning to the end of the writing process. This recursive movement from field texts to research texts was indeed a complex process not only because of the thickening plot and characters, but because my own voices—inquirer, educator, and reflector—began to story their own experiences into the text.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this dissertation was to ensure that I was able to represent my participants in the most faithful ways possible. Bruner (1987), Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000), Conle (2005, 2003, 1999), Coulter et al. (2007), Ely (2007), Polkinghorne (1995), Van Manen (1990) and others assure me that a faithful representation does not, axiomatically, mean a literal representation. For a literal representation, as I examined briefly in Chapter 2, is a problematic construct; for it too is constructed within a network of signs and signifiers and thus is a fiction of language. Coulter et al., 2007, using the work of O'Brien, brilliantly examines this point.

... a faithful representation is what Tim O'Brien, Vietnam veteran and author of *The Things They Carried* (1990) might call the "story-truth," whereas a literal representation he might refer to as the "happening-truth." O'Brien uses the distinction between happening-truth and story-truth to explain how he strives to make the Vietnam experience present and real for the reader through narrative construction. This distinction, we believe, is a useful one in understanding academic narrative constructions:

I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth. Here is the happening-truth. I was once a soldier. There were many bodies, real bodies with real faces, but I was young then and I was afraid to look. And now, twenty years later, I'm left with faceless responsibility and faceless grief.

Here is the story-truth. He was a slim, dead, almost dainty young man of about twenty. He lay in the center of a red clay trail near the village of My Khe. His jaw was in his throat. His one eye was shut, the other eye was a star shaped hole. I killed him. What stories can do, I guess, is make things present. (p. 108)

As a narrative inquirer, it is my obligation to story the lives of my participants to adhere as intimately as possible to the essence of what, why, and how they shared (Ely, 2007). This does not mean I have to use their exact words. It does mean, however, that I have “to create the appearance of ‘experience,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life” (Langer quoted in Ely, 2007; p. 575). Nevertheless, on some occasions the exact words of the participant are so compelling, they have to be heard raw, unedited, and full-throated. Even though Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Polkinghorne and Mishler in (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007) and others claim that “field texts are not constructed with reflective intent ... they are close to experience, tend to be descriptive ... [and] have a recording like quality” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 132), it is my ardent belief that, at times, the participants’ own words are so compelling and revealing that they convey, in narrative fullness, a multifaceted representation of their own human experience that I, as narrator, would never be able to story. Although I generally agree with these authors’ reservation of using field text as research text, there are times when a participant, I believe, must speak in her own words: Only she can disclose, through the choice and punch of her words, the legion of tacit knowledge (Altheide & Johnson, 1994) intentions confluences that compose the amalgam of her experiences. When I use a participant’s own words, however, I am very aware of what Ely (2007) warns: The voice of the participant “must be communicated with just enough of her own color, cadence and usage to ‘show’ her to the readers, all the while taking great care so that her voice cannot be used to stereotype and/or denigrate her” (p. 573). This is particularly true for this inquiry. Given that stereotyping is a major reason, as I will examine in subsequent chapters, for

the disaffection of South Asian males at Montclair High School, I must ensure that I do not engage in or further perpetuate these stereotypes—either against the South Asian males themselves or the perpetrators who are accused of stereotyping.

Finally, Coulter et al., (2007), using Conle’s (2003) criteria of storytelling cite excerpts of interviews as research text. These authors claim that if storytelling includes elements of plot, character, context, ending, temporal sequence, etc... and if interview field notes illustrate a participant’s “meta-awareness of her newfound understanding” (Coulter et al., 2007; p. 113), then interview field notes can be used as storytelling or research text. When poignant interview passages of this inquiry meet Conle’s (2003) criteria of storytelling, I, too, will use them as research text.

From Data Analysis to Themes

Sixty-one conversations with participants, observation field notes, and my own personal reflections yielded a tome of text—roughly over a thousand pages. The number of individual themes and storylines that precipitated from this estuary of fieldnotes was too many to document in this dissertation. To decide which themes to include and which to exclude, therefore, required a deliberate selection process. Before discussing this process, let me briefly examine the origination of themes. “Themes,” according to Ryan and Bernard (2003),

come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach). *A priori* themes come from the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, commonsense constructs; and from researchers’ values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences called this theoretical sensitivity. (p. 88)

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes not only emerge from research data or fieldnotes, but they may exist, in some form, even before the collection and analysis of fieldnotes. Although they may not be accurately or precisely labeled, hints of their presence may pervade the research questions and assumptions. They may be embedded in the very theoretical constructs or literature review that orients the inquiry. Or, latent within the methodology of the inquiry, such as the interview protocol, one may find an iteration of the themes. By and large, according to Ryan and Bernard (2003), *a priori* themes are a part of the attributes of the phenomenon under study.

Which themes to include and which to exclude required a deliberate selection process. As rigorous and circumspect as I was making these decisions, I must acknowledge that this was one of the most difficult processes I conducted in the entire research and dissertation undertaking. It was difficult for many reasons. For brevity, I will identify the main reason. I wanted to weave a rich and textured text that captured “the semblance of events lived and felt” (Ely, 2007; p. 575) by my participants. Experiencing the stress and unease of revealing insights that would be, to some degree, generalizable, however, I felt I needed to identify and/or create themes that would cut across all sixty-one of my participants’ experiences. After all, if I wanted to engage and capture the imagination of educators and academics who thought and worked in more reductionist ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I needed to offer insights that could add to existing knowledge, ways of seeing, and ways of teaching in schools. By succumbing to this tension, I recognized fully that I would have to forfeit or surrender the nuance, particularity, and iridescence that made up my participants’ storied lives. Nevertheless, if I acceded to writing about my participants’ distinctiveness, my study, then, could be

dismissed as a literary fiction that serves little or no theoretical or practical educational utility.

Alas, I chose themes. The practical reason was that I could not possibly represent fully the lives of sixty-one participants. The primary reason, however, was that after sixty-one interviews and innumerable informal conversations, several themes and storylines were not only prominent, but became issues and concerns—even contentions—that were larger than the people who expressed, felt, or apprehended them. These themes appeared as motifs in words, stories, symbols, actions, feelings, jokes, gestures, and graffiti. After constructing and deconstructing plots; analyzing, synthesizing, and re-analyzing narratives; and reading multiple stories as one story and one story as multiple stories, I still had to, for the purposes of organization, clarity, and coherence, distill even further the multiplicity and multi-faceted nature of these themes into distinct categories. So, for example, I collapsed repeating themes such as teachers and students complaining—that the Brown boys’ were intimidating everyone by convoking in large numbers; that they were gangsters and druggies normalizing violence in the school; and that they constantly engaged in audacious behaviours that terrorized the schools—into a dominant theme of *the pathologization of the lived experiences of the Brown boys by the criminalization of their behaviours*. Another example: I collapsed repeating themes of—the outright labeling of the Brown boys as dumb; the low expectations of their academic abilities; and the safety net of their family businesses—into a dominant theme of the *pathologization of the lived experiences of the Brown boys by deficit theorizing*. There were many other repeating themes—such as the South Asian teachers complaining that their “Brownness” was seen and treated as invisible or the repeated claim by the “White”

teachers that schools were meritocratic institutions that provided all children with a level playing field yet claimed that often they felt handcuffed by the Eurocentric bias of their curriculum— that emerged in the research that I did not include in this dissertation as they did not directly inform the two major goals of this study.

Before I explain the process I used of testing, with my participants, the resonance (Conle, 1996, 2000, 2005) of these themes, let me identify the five themes that eventually became the dominant themes of this study: (1) the re-appropriation of the identity term “Brown boy” by key respondents; (2) how the essentialist identity of the violent South Asian male embedded deeply in the public consciousness and the history of criminality has affected and influenced the experiences and identities of current South Asian males attending this school; (3) the pathologization of the lived experiences of the Brown boys by deficit theorizing and criminalizing of their behaviours; (4) pathologizing practices embedded in the *habitus* of the school; and (5) complicity of the Brown boys in the pathologizing of their own identities and lived experiences. Nested within each of these dominant themes are sub-themes that support, clarify, and justify the larger theme. By doing this, I was able to preserve the multi-faceted and nuanced nature of each dominant theme.

I invited all the student participants to a lunch meeting to listen to and understand the important themes that I believed emerged from the study and, most importantly, provide me with feedback. The attendance, as I expected, was abysmal. Cleaving adolescents from their social lives is virtually impossible. I have known this for twenty-five years. I did not, however, have a choice. Ethically, I could not impinge on their school time. And afterschool meetings were non starters; rarely did any student honor his

interview appointment with me that was scheduled afterschool. Hence, my only choice was lunch time. Out of a possible forty-five students, four South Asian girls attended. Each one of them, whole heartedly, confirmed the themes that I had identified captured the salient issues that the “Brown boys” were experiencing. They particularly found the two narratives that I read to them riveting. The discussion that ensued was fecund and particularly legitimizing for them.

I still could not proceed without the input of the “Brown boys.” After three weeks of diligence and indefatigable pestering, I managed to share with six “Brown boys” the themes that I believed best represented their schooling experiences. Five of the six “Brown boys,” enthusiastically endorsed my findings. Although the sixth “Brown boy,” fully agreed with the themes that I had identified, he claimed that the language I used to represent the themes was “too complicated.” What he meant was that I was deflecting their harsh realities and experiences with words that covered and cushioned rather than use words that told of their “story-truth” (Coulter et al, 2007). “Just tell them that they are racists. That’s all. That’s all they need to know!” The anger in his voice rattled my bones. It was then, that I realized and understood ever so clearly that even though I had chosen to reduce my participants lives into themes, I had to, for their identity and integrity (Palmer, 1998), “create the appearance of ‘experience,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life” (Langer quoted in Ely, 2007; p. 575). I hope I have done this.

4. CONTEXT

A narrative research text is principally a temporal text: One that is context rich not context free or universal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). All narratives are grounded in “what has been, what is now, and what is becoming” (p. 146). They are “placed” not abstracted from the milieu that helped fashion their existence. To make explicit the dimension of situation or place is not to imply that all people in that place are a certain way—a type of essentialism that I have already examined—but that all people in that place have a narrative history. They are *becoming* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 145) in the soil of place rather than *being* in a context-free, abstract, or neutral universe. The main aim of this chapter is to establish the place and context of this study. First, I provide a brief history of Montclair High School. I then examine the limited statistics released by the Ministry of Education, BC (2009) for the academic achievement of the students attending Montclair High School. I also briefly examine the key school and community demographic data to situate Montclair High School in the “soil” of place—one of the three dimensions of the narrative inquiry space that frames this study. Second, I attempt to ground this study within the larger Indo-Canadian “problem” as positioned by the Canadian media and, more specifically, by the reports and studies commissioned by the government of British Columbia. Third, I examine the narratives of violence and criminality associated with the South Asian male students who attended Montclair High School approximately seven years ago. I posit, and in subsequent chapters will argue, this group of violent male South Asian students framed within the current hyperreal discourse of the Indo-Canadian “problem” have profoundly influenced the construction of the “violent South Asian male” identity, which years later, still negatively shapes the

identities and perhaps, perceptions of South Asian male students who currently attend Montclair High School. Finally, I end with a narrative that attempts to voice the heartfelt outrage felt by many of the male South Asian students I interviewed at Montclair High School. The narrative foregrounds many of the key uncertainties and contentions that orbit the hearts and minds of these students.

Montclair High School

As I have already stated, data that are available for British Columbia schools are not disaggregated in categories other than gender, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, and special education and non-special education students. I have, however, compiled data from a variety of different sources that further defines and develops the context of this study. To protect the confidentiality of the school and school district, I have suppressed the exact figures or provided approximate figures for the purpose of comparison.

In 2006-07, the year of the study, approximately 1000 students were enrolled at Montclair High School. This state of the art public school, where I conducted my inquiry, was built in the mid-1990s after a mysterious fire had destroyed the original school building that had served the community since the 1920s. The new school design included an addition of a community center, which has become a well used and prominent facility in the community. It also became a junior-senior school, catering to all students from grade 8 to grade 12.

Academic Achievement of Students at Montclair High School

Table 1 in Appendix 3 provides a quick summary of the academic achievement of students at Montclair High School during the academic year of 2006-07. The data were compiled from the statistics released by the Ministry of Education, BC (2009).

Based on this data, it is evident that the students at Montclair High School are below both the school district and province averages in all examinable subject areas. Furthermore, the male students at Montclair High School fare worse in all categories compared to the female students in the same school, the district male student average, and the provincial average.

Following this further, approximately 200 students were enrolled in grade 12 and eligible for graduation, in the year of my study. The graduation rate for that year was 85%, a little more than 10% below the school district average. 48% of the female students and 30% of the male students who did graduate did so with honors¹². Both of these percentages were much lower than the district average of approximately 65% and 45% respectively for the same year. Additionally, of the approximately 2500 students who graduated in the school district, roughly 300 students received the grade 12 *Graduation Program Examination Scholarships*.¹³ Approximately 3% of these 300 recipients were from Montclair High School—the lowest number of students out of *all* the high schools in the school district.

Key Community and School Demographics

The exact population of the neighbourhood of Montclair High School is masked. It is, however, well over 100,000. According to Census Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006b), 65% of the neighbourhood is identified as visible minority. Eighty percent of the total population of the school catchment area of Montclair High School is identified as

¹² An honors graduate: A graduating student who achieves a grade point average (GPA) of greater than 3.0 (a letter grade of B).

¹³ Eligibility: (1) Must receive at least 86% in each of his/her 3 (three) best provincial examinations and achieve at least a "B" final mark in the English 12 or Francais langue première 12 examination; (2) Must be, or must have been, enrolled as a student or registered as a home-schooled child in a qualifying public or independent school in British Columbia; (3) Must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident (landed immigrant) at the time of writing the examination; (4) May not have previously studied the examined subjects at the post-secondary level; and (5) Fulfilled the graduation requirements.

visible minority. The population of South Asian in this school catchment area is 23%. If this catchment area and the adjacent catchment area of the neighbourhood are combined, over half of the entire South Asian population of this suburb resides in these two catchment areas.

The male and female ratio of the approximately thousand students that attended Montclair during the year of my inquiry was uncannily identical. Slightly over 35% of the students at Montclair High School self-identified as South Asian or Indo-Canadian. This figure was an amalgam of various official and non-official school records. The school administration and several teachers endorsed this figure based on their data and experiences.

Slightly over 10% of the school population was officially identified as English as second Language students¹⁴. Over 60% of the students at Montclair identified that their home language was not English. The district average was slightly over 50% and the province average was 22%. The top non-English home language in the school was Punjabi.

86% of the Montclair students' families who were aged 25-64 had high school graduation certificates compared to the school district average of 91%. 26% of the Montclair students' families who were aged 25-64 had Bachelors degree or higher compared to the district average of 32%.

Lone-parent families comprised 16% of Montclair's population compared to school district average of 15%. The average family income was less than \$45,000, which was considerably lower than any of the other school catchment areas of this suburb. The

¹⁴ A program provided to students whose primary languages are other than English, and who may require additional services.

highest average family income was approximately \$90,000. Approximately 20% of the families of students who attended Montclair had an annual income of under \$30,000, which was the lowest of any catchment area in this suburb.

Violence

During the past twenty years, approximately 100 South Asian young men have been killed as a result of criminal violence (Canadian Heritage, 2006), with these murder numbers steadily increasing dramatically within the past few months. Culbert (2009) of the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper reports:

What's happening now—nine people shot in 11 days in Metro Vancouver—echoes events in the fall of 2007, when 10 people were shot dead during a month of gangland mayhem. It is also reminiscent of 2005, when a spate of targeted killings brought to 60 the body count of Indo-Canadian men.

According to many news reports, the murders have been audacious and often been carried out execution-style. For example, Brown (2004) of the *Washington Post* writes: “The most famous case involved a masked man who walked up to a notorious drug dealer on a dance floor and fired a bullet into his head behind the ear.” Police and media reports have repeatedly stated that gang related murders involving South Asian males

have occurred in the middle of rush hour traffic, at large wedding receptions, at nightclubs, in movie theatres, and in upper-middle class neighbourhoods. In some notable cases, perpetrators of crimes and acts of violence received so much media and community attention that they reached hero status. To some in the South Asian community, these perpetrators seem to be revered for their daring acts of violence and their defiance against mainstream Canadian society. Victims and perpetrators of these acts seem to have come from all socio-economic backgrounds, some growing up in highly affluent families (Canadian Heritage, 2006; p.9)

Former British Columbia Attorney-General and B.C. Supreme Court and Court of Appeal judge Wally Oppal stated frankly, this violence "is clearly something that is a cancer in our society" (Bolan, 2005). Many leaders and organizations in the South Asian communities have attempted to diagnose, theorize, and address the nature of the issues, but despite the differing interpretations, theories, and action plans, they all state definitively that there is a definite problem. Purewal, a political scientist professor (Matthews, 2008) states, "It's really a unique phenomenon that these people [South Asian males] are killing each other." And while only a tiny percentage are in gangs, the sensational murders have given the entire community an "image problem."

This growing level of violence and crime within the South Asian communities has been so well documented that many within and outside of the community have suggested that the coverage has been sensationalized, unduly portraying all South Asian males as hedonists, gangsters, drug traffickers, and girlfriend/wife abusers. Demonization of minoritized groups in the media is well documented. Jiwani, 2006 and others (Ericson 1991; Goodey, 2001; and Henry et. al. 1996) have brilliantly argued the media's objectification, dehumanization, and inferiorization of minoritized groups and the concomitant results. The general line of logic used by these and other authors unfolds as follows: The dominant discourses of power, of which the media is one powerful contributor, consistently shape society's "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972), to create a dominant "common-sense stock of knowledge" (Jiwani, 2006; p. 31). This common-sense repository of knowledge, not only is a product of the dominant discourses of power but, in turn, justifies and legitimizes its very existence and necessity. Over time, this stock of knowledge is taken for granted, accepted, and replicated. It becomes irrefutable

truth. Following this point further and applying it to this study: The vocabulary of violence, crime, and murder are now inextricably associated with the South Asian communities. They have become commonplace in media reportage about South Asian communities. Using Jiwani's term, it has become our society's "common-sense stock of knowledge." The "transparency" and "naturalness" (Hall, cited in Jiwani; p.4) with which the vocabulary of violence is used when describing South Asian males makes it doubly difficult to examine the premises on which these claims are founded. A "regime of truth" (Foucault cited in Jiwani, 2006; p. 9) has been constructed: The South Asian male is a murderous miscreant who traffics drugs and abuses his wife or girlfriend. Nonetheless, whether it is exaggerated or caricatured in the media, representative of a certain element within the South Asian communities, or both, a problem exists: What has been constructed from these multiple discourses is an essentialist identity of a brazenly violent South Asian/Indo-Canadian male. This essentialist identity is reified in the media, perpetuated by the actions of a few criminals within the community, and valorized by a small population of South Asian male youth. Media representation of the South Asian communities, however, is not the focus of this study. Nor is my focus justifying or denying the veracity of these claims so ubiquitous in the media. I do, nevertheless, acknowledge and will demonstrate that the symbolic and material effects of these representations have a direct and indirect impact on the perceptions of the South Asian male students at Montclair High School.

Situating the discourse of the male South Asian students at Montclair High School within this broader context of excessive South Asian male violence as reported by the media is critically important as these conversations are consistently played out in

classrooms, hallways, offices, and staffrooms. The construction of the essentialist South Asian male identity as violent and criminal within the public imagination is, as we will see shortly, “written on” the identities of male South Asian students. These representations trafficked freely and uncritically in Montclair School, as many educators, students, and parents frequently positioned the South Asian male students as subjects of those representations. In other words, the male South Asian students were interpellated by this subject-position. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 3, interpellation, is Althusser’s term to describe how subjects are “recruited” into subject-positions (Woodward, 1997). In subsequent chapters, I will argue that South Asian boys, whether or not they have a history of violence or misbehavior, are interpellated into the essentialist identity of the violent South Asian male.

History of Criminality

Blood on white porcelain is messy, intensely bright, and always dangerous. Blood in the dark is warm, secretive, and always unexpected. I don’t know why I know this; it seems that I should know this.
(Anonymous)

To further problematize this discourse, nested within this wider discourse of the South Asian male violence in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver is another discourse of South Asian male violence at Montclair High School. Let me begin with Parker who describes his understanding of the context; below is an excerpt of an interview I conducted with him that lasted well over two hours.

It seems to me, year and year out, since 1996 when we became an 8-12 school, there has always been a group of disaffected, disinterested Indo-Canadian boys who have things going on outside of school that have been more important to them than school itself. As some of the staff has already told you, we have all taught kids who have been murdered; I have taught four of these boys right here in this classroom who have been murdered. I

knew them personally. And there is an undercurrent of that drug culture that seems to be tied to our school and I am not sure why.

Using a narrative entitled *Bête Noir* that captures the “story-truth” (O’Brien quoted in Coulter et al, 2007) of another social studies teacher, Callum, I add further to this already storied context.

Bête Noir

I have taught murderers and the murdered in my class. A handful of them. Sam Grewal was one; Balbir Thakkar, another. And even Gurpreet Johl: can you imagine? All of these guys were in some way associated with Bindy Johal, arguably the most notorious South Asian gangster in Canada. These guys work in our nightmares.

Right after graduation, Sam Grewal died in the arms of our school liaison officer. One day she warns him, yet again, not to park in the teachers’ lot; the next day she stares into his eyes as he fades into oblivion in her arms. She gets a call to investigate a disturbance at a large wedding and there she sees Sam, shot, bleeding.

They say that a shot through the heart immediately stops the blood flow but cells of muscle, skin, and bone live on—dying days later when waste products build up. How long ago did Sam suffer his first shot through his heart? Were the waste products building up every time he was called down to the office or police station? Every time he consciously chose to park in the principal’s stall or in the middle of the highway median, and laugh? Every time the eyes of others looked at him with scorn or perhaps, even, envy?

*As the school liaison officer watched Sam’s eyes dim, I wonder if he saw in her eyes *bête noir* or benevolence.*

Let me continue to deepen the context of South Asian male violence at Montclair High School by sharing yet another social studies teacher, John's, "story-truth," which I constructed into a narrative entitled *Police Scanner*.

Police Scanner

Let me start by saying that I don't like to use the term Brown boys; I find it terribly degrading. Even though they call themselves Brown boys or Brown crew, I call them Indo-boys.

I have heard so many fragments of stories on my police scanner. It is always on; I only turn the volume down when I'm teaching and then it is back up when I'm not. Like me, my dad was also a social studies teacher; he lived by the apothegm that a real social studies classroom must invite in the surfeit of stories that are born in the community. His way was a CB radio. My way is a police scanner. It keeps me in the know and has now for the past twenty-eight years. It isn't the stories of the bizarre, the peculiar, but the stories of the mundane, the commonplace that truly teach you about the indomitability and squalor of the human spirit. Wrapping history and geography with these local, everyday stories makes it real for students. Quite frankly, it also makes it real for me. This is how history and geography become our own. This is how I keep it fresh.

Rogues of our time who menace society are also mirrors that reflect back to us our very own monstrosity. Bindy Johal is one such character. Kelly Buttar and Gary Rai, students at our school at one time, are two others. For many of our Indo-boys, these villains are lionized; they are glittering symbols of power and wealth, even though two are dead and one is a paraplegic.

Anyway, Buttar and Rai, my ex-students, were shot by Asian gangs. I first heard the news, of course, on my police scanner but the stories behind the stories came from my Indo-boys. They know the arcane behind the stories. They hear the whispers of their community trying desperately to understand itself. Not many adults in their community, however, want them to hear because they are, after all, kids. What the adults don't realize, however, is that they do hear. They hear and sometimes they are confused. They hear and sometimes they are scared. They hear and sometimes they are angry. They hear and sometimes they puff out their chests. They hear and, most times, they want to talk. That is when I am there for them. Very often, they speak to me so that I can help them understand. That is how I know so much about them.

The gang detectives in Vancouver, whom I know because of my leadership work, were shocked at the accuracy of my understanding. In fact, one of the detectives asked me how I knew all this information. I smiled: Teaching has its privileges! I should probably stop talking, as you can well imagine, recounting some of these sordid tales on your recorder may not be very good for me.

The legacy of the “hardcore” group of South Asian male students who attended Montclair High School several years ago is still firmly entrenched in the psyche of all the educators, non-teaching staff, and students who presently form the school community. Although I did not interview everyone in the school, all the educators whom I did interview claimed that this knowledge was, as English teacher Roger, states “true and solid as the rafters that hold up the school roof.” Roger, continues: “... just like a prospective athlete always knows whether the team he is being recruited for has a winning or losing tradition, our students coming into the school knows [sic], with no

illusion, what they are walking into.” Like the official institutional narratives that are perpetuated to nurture and sustain the identity of the school—narratives such as vision and aspiration of the school or idealized representations of its action plans (Britzman, 1991)—the narratives of the murderous South Asian male students who studied in the classrooms of Montclair have also become the official institutional narratives of the school. All who enter the school also enter into the living narratives of the “Brown boys”—a term I will examine closely in the next chapter. Student teachers, newly hired teachers, or incoming students would not be properly acculturated into the school, according to Ava—an English teacher I interviewed—without participating in the endless stories of the violent Brown boys immortalized by the school community (Linde, 2003).

Ava explains:

And there is an undercurrent of that drug culture that seems to be tied to our school and I am not sure why ... like even in June, there was this boy who went missing, he was in our school last year and is missing in Vanderhoof related to drugs; a truck full of pot plants went into the water and they haven't found him. They don't know whether he is dead or if he is hiding. This is the story of [Montclair]. Like I said, with the number of kids that have murdered or have gone missing, the base knowledge—not much from the administration, which is definitely a problem at this school—certainly gets out there. Everyone in the school knows about it. Substitutes that come into our school for just a few weeks or student teachers and definitely new students who come every year. All of them quickly get the picture.

Based on these insights, I claim, and in the subsequent chapters will defend, the identities of these drug dealing “hardcore Brown boys” who attended Montclair High School several years ago, coupled with the regime of truth (Jiwani, 2006) of the violent Indo-Canadian male firmly stamped into public consciousness, decidedly influence how

South Asian male students at Montclair High School are positioned and how they position themselves.

I end this chapter with a narrative from the perspective of a student, Jas, who attempts to voice the violation and indignity felt by many of the male South Asian students I interviewed at Montclair High School. This narrative begins to seed the themes of pathologization and criminalization that will continue to develop and inform the ensuing chapters. The narrative also introduces a few of the key characters who will get “their hands stamped on the[ir] way out.” They will wander in and out of the remaining chapters “without paying, without warning, any time they want” (Blaise cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 172).

Dead Drug Dealer

My father’s favourite hockey player was Patrick Roy. The Patrick Roy that played for the Montreal Canadiens not the Colorado Avalanche. Roy’s poster, now fourteen years old and still in pristine condition, is still up on my wall. My dad bought it for me when he broke his promise and didn’t take me to the Canadiens-Canucks hockey game. As I wailed—especially louder when he backtracked—he tried to explain to me that he had promised his best friend the ticket first. “Stupidly,” he apologized, “I forgot this first promise when I promised you. A first promise,” he continued awkwardly, “always has more power than a second promise; that’s why I have to take uncle Narayan instead of you.” I wailed louder not so much because I was going to miss the hockey game but because I knew, with all my heart that dad wanted to be with his friend more than me. My mom, as she did countless of times back then, took me to McDonalds for a hot fudge sundae, which I ate in silence as we slowly drove back home.

The year my mom died, Patrick Roy took his mediocre Canadiens team all the way to the Stanley cup finals. During the months immediately after her death, the only time my dad spoke to me and my sister was when Montreal won. “Roy,” my dad told us, “vowed to his teammates that he would not let in a goal in overtime. Before each overtime period, he would make a speech: ‘Don’t worry about me guys; just go out there and score. They will not score on me!’” He never did let in a goal in any of the ten overtime games, a record that still stands to this day. The Canadiens won the Stanley Cup that year. My dad said it was because Roy had ice in his veins. He never got rattled. He never let down his teammates. My dad, too, had ice in his veins; he never talked about mom nor did he ever shed a tear before or after the funeral.

I braced myself for the recitation of the Ardās¹⁵ just before my best friend Sunny’s body was taken to the cremation site; these prayers always transported me back to when I stood before my mom’s body and stared at her swollen eyes.

Nanak nam chardi kala tere bhane sarbat da bhala’¹⁶.

I never knew why mom’s eyes were swollen when it was the cancer that ate her stomach. The only time I willed myself to ask my dad a question about mom’s death, he pretended not to have heard me. I let that question forever hide under mom’s swollen eyes. Roy was the last image I saw each night before I closed my eyes; my mom’s swollen eyes, however, were always atop of his.

Just as mom’s eyes were swollen, Sunny’s eyes, however, weren’t. His funeral wasn’t a result of stomach cancer but a gunshot. The newspapers cornered his life into a

¹⁵ The Ardās is a Sikh prayer that is conducted before performing or undertaking any significant task.

¹⁶ Nanak prays that the name may be magnified; by Your grace may all be blest.’ (McLeod cited in Nesbitt (1991))

column of the usual narrow and tidy words: drug dealing, violence, stolen cars, and guns. What they failed to write or care about was that it was Sunny who took me to my first hockey game. It was in his car that I first smoked and felt my chest loosen enough to cry my first tears of mom's absence. I never had to tell him when I missed mom. He always knew and had a beer ready for me. We always drank in silence; the same way I always ate my hot fudge sundae.

So when Mr. Rory, the school principal, compared me to a dead drug dealer, I was pissed. How could he say that? Fuckin' prick!

First of all, it wasn't me who lit the firecracker in the washroom. This time, I didn't even know who did it. Even if I did—like the time Manny's crew pulled the fire alarm—I wouldn't tell him, suspension or no suspension. I've always got any of the crews' back. Anyway, it was epic to see the teachers' faces when the firecrackers went off. They've never given a shit about us anyways; why should we give a shit about them. They always blame us for everything that goes wrong in the school. Anything bad that happens, round up the Brown boys! Graffiti: Oh, it must be the Brown boys. Someone's ipod is missing: Oh, it must be the Brown boys! Broken window: Oh, it must be the Brown boys. Someone pissed on the toilet seat: Oh, it must be the Brown boys!

In all the chaos, Mr. Rory grabs me by the shoulder and accuses me of setting off the firecrackers. All I was doing, like the rest of the school, was standing there and laughing. I told him not to touch me. How dare he grab me! Even though I told him I didn't do it, he marches me down to his office. That's when he starts his usual recording; half way through, this time though, he changes it up a bit. He asks me if I want to end up

like a dead drug dealer! “You know Jas,” he tries to make the words as serious as he can, “you keep finding trouble and eventually trouble will find you. You have one more year before you graduate. Make it count Jas. You do want to graduate right?” I kept looking down.

“Well, don’t you? Or do you want to end up like a dead drug dealer?”

Asshole.

I thought of Sunny. He was a legend; all the guys at this school still talk about him. I wondered if he was ever accused of things he didn’t do. I wondered if he ever got caught for the things that he did do. Maybe in the end, it all evened out. Whatever the case, he always had his friends’ back. You never betray your blud¹⁷. No matter what happens, your crew is your crew.

I looked up from the ground and stared hard at Mr. Rory. I didn’t answer him. Just then I realized that Sunny, too, wouldn’t have answered him either. That’s when I knew I finally had ice in my veins.

¹⁷ Blood

5. POSITIONING OF SOUTH ASIAN BOYS

Analysis of all the interview field notes, classroom and school observations, and classroom assignments and journals, evinced the South Asian boys at Montclair High School were positioned in four categories. As with discursive categories, the boundaries that demarcate the following categories are not rigid and impermeable; in fact, as personalities, contexts, and relationships change, individuals in one group can position themselves or be positioned into other groups. To the large majority of non-South Asian students whom I interviewed, these categories weren't relevant or meaningful; they saw most South Asian boys as one monolithic group of Brown boys, who had the characteristics of the *Brown crew*. Nevertheless, for non-South Asian students who were cognizant of the heterogeneity within and amongst the South Asian population had a marked tendency to classify South Asian male students as (1) Smart Brown guys; (2) New Immigrants; (3) Quiet Brown guys; and (4) the Brown crew or the Brown boys. Analysis of the field data of the South Asian boys themselves revealed that they positioned themselves in three general categories, which very closely resemble the four categories just identified. They loosely categorized themselves as (1) "Regular" Brown guys; (2) New Immigrants; or (3) Part of the Brown Crew or the Brown boys. As will become apparent from the descriptions detailed below, the category of "Regular Brown guys" conflates the categories of "Smart Brown guys" and "Quiet Brown guys" that the non-South Asian students use to classify South Asian students in Montclair High School.

Predominately using the language of students themselves, I will, in this chapter, attempt to describe how the smart Brown guys, new immigrants; and quiet Brown guys are viewed, characterized, and treated. The Brown crew or Brown boys, who form the

fourth category and who are the focus of this study, I will examine in the subsequent five chapters. Let me underline, once again, these are discursive categories used for purposes of examination, inquiry, and analysis in this study. The category descriptors are not hard and fast labels affixed to each group; rather they serve as mirrors reflecting back the lived experiences of many of the Montclair High School educators and secondary students. Additionally, I examine in detail how these identity terms at Montclair High School are positioned and how they position themselves by “reading” the research data through the theoretical lenses of postmodernist and post-positivist realist theory of identity. That is, by employing the discursive and semiotic insights of postmodernism and the epistemic significance of experience and the inextricable link between identities and materiality of post-positivist realism—which I examined in Chapter 2—I propose below one of many possible ways of how these South Asian boys are viewed. A compass that I use to help navigate this discussion is Hall’s (1997b) outwardly simple but inwardly complex definition of identity: “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves ...” (p. 52).

The Smart Brown Guys

The Smart Brown guys, according to the non-South Asian students interviewed at Montclair High School, are the students who are most likely to score high marks and receive academic recognition through honour roll status or subject excellence awards. These students are known as the “Doctor” or “IT” (Information Technology) types, who will probably go on to make “beaucoup” (Katernia, student) money. Their intelligence, according to the majority of the non-South Asian students I interviewed, is not regarded

as “in your face” (Zoë, student) smart but hidden or understated until it is shown or revealed, as the following student remarks:

... you don't realize that they are that smart. It isn't in your face smart like some Asians, who want to rub it in everyone's faces. It's like, *you* got the 99 in the Math test or *you* got the 100% plus bonus on the Physics exam. *You?* You wouldn't think that it was them. They just kinda are quiet and when they talk you think, wow, you are kinda smart... [emphasis added] (Amy)

When speaking about the South Asian boys in the school, many of the educators interviewed, too, distinguished between the “Smart” South Asian boys and the “challenging” ones. This was particularly evident when the educators referred or described the recalcitrance of the “Brown Crew”; they used the “smart” boys as a way to compare:

I would say that when you talk to them [staff] about Indo kids, you mean Indo boys to them. When they hear that, they differentiate them. And when you talk about the Indo boys, you are talking to them about a particular group that hang around together—not Indo boys in total because there are a number of kids, for some reason, who do quite well. (Kirk)

We have had some absolutely

The “you” that I emphasized in the above quote was particularly revealing. As Amy shared her thought with me, she too, was surprised at her own emphasis of her usage of “you.” When my formal interview with her was over and the digital voice recorder was shut off, she admitted to me, as she packed up her belongings, that she was surprised by some of her comments. She specifically referenced this part of the interview and admitted that as she heard herself speak, she couldn't believe she was saying what she was saying. “I guess, we are all racist in some ways ... but I didn't realize how much of a racist I am.”¹⁸ Amy realized through the course of the interview that even though she was praising the intelligence of these South Asian boys, she

¹⁸ Permission granted from the student to use this quote as it was stated outside the formal interview format.

great Indo-Canadian kids. They are now becoming doctors but they are an anomaly. They don't buy into this group thing that the hardcore Indo-Canadian kids have. (Roger)

These Indo-Canadian students were different. They were business oriented; they are going to go to SFU now. They weren't the typical or should I say average Indo-Canadian kid that we see in this school. They did quite well in school. One would help the other. They actually cared about being in class and learning... (Lisa)

Any South Asian boy who did well was noticed for his accomplishments. They were atypical. They were the "anomaly." They were the exceptions to the rule.

They became the model South Asian male students, who were used as a way to further pathologize or condemn the low achievement commonly associated with the "Brown boys" in Montclair High School. In other words, these "Smart" South Asian male students were hailed for their intelligence and hard work ethic, according to the majority of the non-South Asian students I interviewed, but were done so in a way that reproached the Brown boys for their unintelligence and laziness.

Literature on the model minority myth, as advanced by Maclear (1994), Lee (1996, 2001), Nigo (2006), Osajima (1987), and others, elucidates this point further. The underlying message of this myth is its affirmation of the North American achievement

was dismayed by her own feelings of being surprised at their intelligence. She did not realize, until after she heard herself speak, that she did not see South Asian boys as intelligent. Only when she heard that some of the South Asian boys had scored high on a math or physics exam or when they shared something insightful in class, did she realize that they were actually smart. Her default perception of South Asian boys was one of "low achieving." As she spoke, this perception—hidden, sub-conscious, or otherwise—became apparent to her. The dawning revelation of her own "racism," as she labeled it was disconcerting to her.

ideology: Anyone who has the resolve and determination to succeed in this land of opportunity will do so freely and unfettered. The model minority myth, in particular, lauds Asians for succeeding on their own, without special help from anyone. They have “made it.” They capitalize on the opportunities presented to them and continue to work diligently to improve the quality of their lives. Any minoritized group, willing to work hard in this land of opportunity, according to this myth, *should* achieve success. In the case of the “smart” Asians, they have worked hard and are experiencing success. If any group doesn’t succeed, it is its fault. Their failure is not a result of the society in which they live in or the norms of the schools they attend. Instead, their failure is directly a result of their lack of industry or their unwillingness to espouse the culture and values of the dominant society. Surely—the myth persists—the North American society is designed for everyone to succeed. The blueprint is available for all to follow. Should any group fail, it is because there is something wrong with its people. Should any members of the group complain that it is not their fault they have failed, they are immediately positioned as ungratefult unwilling to take responsibilities for their own actions and deficiencies. They are reminded that through perseverance and inherent motivation anyone can succeed: The Asian model minorities are a living example. This practice of exalting the “successful” minoritized groups and demonizing the “unsuccessful” ones diverts the attention away from the structural and systemic factors that contribute to the inequities, and instead, focuses the blame squarely on the minoritized group (Cummins, 1996, 1997, 2001). Instead of examining the structures, attitudes, and practices of the various institutions in our society that may be contributing to the challenges experienced by various minoritized groups, the focus, according to the model minority myth, is to

hold up to the light the successes of a particular minoritized group and garland them with honor for succeeding in a society designed to enable everyone who follows the rules to succeed. Individuals, who do not succeed, then, are reviled for their incompetence and deficiency. They are thus pathologized for not measuring up to the successful model minorities (Shields et al., 2005).

When describing these “Smart” South Asian students, teachers consistently used descriptors such as “respectful,” “polite,” and “pleasant and gentlemanly.” These South Asian students’ disposition and outward behaviours were admired. Once again, however, the praise was framed as an opposition to the “other” Brown boys whose behaviours and demeanour were consistently denigrated. *These* South Asian students are “polite” and “respectful”; *those* Brown boys are “disrespectful” and “rude.” As the teachers complimented the behaviours of the “Smart” boys, implicit in their remarks was a condemnation of the Brown boys. The “Smart” boys were pitted against the Brown boys. Clear oppositions were created. In this binary opposition, the opposing groups are differentially weighted so that one group in the dichotomy is more valued or preferentially treated than the other group, who is outwardly rebuked (Woodward, 1997). In this false dualism, the “Smart” boys were the “normal” and the Brown boys were the “abnormal.” Consider the following comments made by Kirk, a teacher leader:

This school had a very strong rugby team and we were in the finals one year and these guys [Brown boys] came out but they didn’t act like normal fans. Normal fans kind of spread out along the sidelines when they watch the game. These guys were like a school of fish. It was really weird. There were 10 or 12 of them but they stood in a group, not quite in a circle, but in a bundle, you know you can’t even see the game like that but they didn’t know how to act...

...There were a couple of Indo boys on the team but those are the boys that have done well. They are respectful. They are not afraid to belong in teams. You see, most Indo boys don't participate or belong in anything. The ones that do, do fairly well; that is interesting isn't it?

Two positions emerged from the South Asian boys, who were identified or self-identified as the "Smart" South Asian male students. The first position was to fashion an identity that divorced themselves completely from the Brown boys. The second position was to legitimize their own intelligence and strong academic standing in the school but to decry the treatment of South Asians in the school and media. Jag, who identified himself as a "Brown Canadian" (more about this in Chapter 6) voices the sentiments shared by many of the students who espoused the first position.

Personally, I have always jumped from group to group; I never stay solidly in one. I like meeting new people. I love variety. The group that I won't hang with anymore is the Brown Crew. I know I'm Brown and that everyone thinks they are my blud. But I am nothing like them. They aren't my blud ... Last year, I was considered the Chinese- Brown kid coz I hang with all the Chinese kids and I take all the honor classes and stuff like that, which is classified as the Chinese kids coz they are considered the smart ones. ... I used to hang with them [Brown boys] about three years ago. But whenever I was with them I used to get in trouble way more than when I hang with my other White and Asian friends. ... When something happens, the teachers target the Brown boys. I wasn't cool with that. I didn't want to be around that kind of noise. I'm not that way. I know I am smart; I've been on the honor roll every term. Chemistry, I did in the summer so I could have a spare this term. If I try in any one of my classes, I could do well like score an A. Why do I want to flush my future away like they [Brown boys] are?

The position that these "Smart" South Asian students took, which Jag captures poignantly, was to separate themselves from the Brown boys. They saw clearly that any association with the Brown boys meant getting into "trouble." Jag states emphatically that when he was friends with the Brown boys three years ago, he got into trouble from

his teachers much more than he does now that he does not associate with them and is only friends with “Whites” and “Asians.” To accept Jag’s conclusion without further inquiry and analysis is probably naïve: There are probably many factors associated with the teachers’ perceived change in behaviour toward Jag. This attitudinal change may not simply be a result of Jag changing the “ethnicity” (Henze, et al., 2000) of his friendship circle. On the other hand, it may be. Further examination in this area would need to occur to uncover the details necessary to make a more definitive claim. Regardless, what is clear is that Jag did not want his school life to unfold in a manner that fomented “trouble” from his teachers. He concluded the best way to do this is to disassociate from the Brown boys. “I didn’t want to be around that kind of noise.”

Jag, like the other “Smart” South Asian students who took this position, also knew that he was academically capable and had the aptitude for succeeding; he believed in his abilities and saw for himself a bright future ahead. He felt that his affiliation with the Brown boys would sabotage this future, which for him was unacceptable. “Why do I want to flush my future away like they are”? Utilizing the capital of academic achievement to secure a prosperous future, Jag and the other South Asian students who took this position made an active choice to fashion an identity in opposition to that of the Brown boys. They did not want “the black cloud, or should I say, pot smog, that hangs over the head [sic] of the Brown boys” (interview Sheldon) to darken their current or future school success.

Another group of “Smart” South Asian students took a different position. Although they confirmed their own intelligence and strong academic standing in the school—which was clearly very important to them—they also condemned the treatment

of South Asians in the school and media. The following narrative, as told by Sukh, with the insertion of actual quotes made by students, represents the voice and sentiments shared by students who espoused this second position.

Just or Unjust: Is the Difference Also a Matter of Action?

I admire my dad and, in this school, Mr. Greentree. They are very accepting of other cultures. I admire that. They both, also, don't accept injustices. When there is an injustice they always speak out. Like the other day, Mr. G barked about residential schools: "That was wrong. That was unjust." He just said it without wavering. He didn't ask us to form little groups and talk about this or that like some other teachers do: "Critically think about the issue; what are the pros and cons?" Or, "Draw a Venn diagram and write, in the first circle, all the points for blah blah blah." No. If Canadians are wrong, he will say that Canadians are wrong. If some racial groups are wrong, he will say that they are wrong. I admire that!

My dad, too, is like that. A few years back, when I was young, my dad, mom, and I were on the bus, which we rode from time to time when my dad's cataracts acted up. My mom didn't drive then. She stopped altogether a few years back. In a freakish chain of events, the front left wheel of her car came loose and she had to swerve frantically—and pray even more frantically—to avoid hitting a pedestrian. She said it wasn't a freak accident. Her dad died tragically because the front left wheel of his car came loose and to avoid hitting an oncoming car, he smashed onto a concrete median. She blamed herself for testing fate:

"You shouldn't test kismet. If you feel you are going to do something wrong, don't do it. Those feelings come from places that are beyond us; they have in them a message

we must court. I knew I shouldn't have driven that morning; I felt it in my bones when I woke up. But I still did and look what happened. It was your Da [my grandfather, her dad] that saved me. He didn't want history repeating itself. This karma of tragedy for our family—present and future—had to stop. So it was he who swerved the car from danger. Not me. I don't have that kind of strength to turn a steering wheel that fast. But Da saved me. Actually, I think he saved many of our future generations. He freed me, possibly your future wife, possibly your future daughter, and in turn, your daughter's daughter from a karmic cycle of tragedy. So many loose wheels and so many lives now saved all because of Da.”

Anyway, we were all riding the bus quietly when a group of nothing-better-to-do-than-cause-trouble teens began jeering an elderly Indo-Canadian couple sitting in front of them. I don't think the couple spoke English; if they did, it wasn't very well. The taunts began. At first, it was a teasing whisper: Garlic, garlic, garlic. The other guys in their group caught on once they realized the allure of menace behind the word. The whisper soon turned into a chant and then a roar. The roar gave way to peals of laughter and hooting. The chant, roar, and laughter alternated for a few rounds like the wave in a football stadium. One teen brazenly entered the elderly woman's personal space. He bobbed his head next to the woman's ear and screeched “Garrrrlick! Gggg-garrrrlick”! The couple stared straight ahead. Spartanly. They were probably more petrified than I was. My dad lifted my mom's hand that was grasping his thigh. She knew oh so well how to contain his widening arc of wrath. He stood up and marched desperately over to the pack of hyperventilating hyenas.

“What the hell do you all smell like? Pork! Disgusting pink pork! Rotting, foul pork. Pork sewer!” His mouth was an aerosol of spit.

The teens were stunned. The audacity of this stranger to blindsides their fun! They all stared, briefly, at my father in silence. I don't think it was his size that intimidated them. He makes most around him small. At six six, he stood like a side of a mountain. This time, it was his eyes not his size that diminished his audience. A nightmare from a previous life began to uncoil. A childhood nightmare he could scarcely remember; a childhood memory he could scarcely forget. My father's eyes eviscerated them all. Sensing rightly that a battle could ensue, the boys wisely exited the bus at the next stop. As one of the teens retreated down the steps, he spat out venomously: “Fuckin’ Punjab! Lucky for you, we have to get off!” Just before jumping off, however, he bellowed, “Here you go, rag head, some pork for you to whiff.” He then kneeled forward and with measured strain farted an orotund note.

The elderly couple, the entire time, continued to stare straight ahead.

Like I said, my dad doesn't stand for injustices. Mr. G, too, is the same way. He would never have done what Ms. Chan, our social studies teacher did last year. To start a unit on Muslims and Islam, Ms. Chan asked us all to write down the first thoughts that came to our minds about Muslims. Some people wrote that they blow up buildings; that they marry their family; and that they kill for fun. Ms. Chan just read them out loud and put them away. There was one Muslim student in our class, who said he wasn't religious, but everyone kept asking him questions that made him feel really uncomfortable. Even though he kept saying, “I don't know, I don't know” in his broken English, the pestering

and mocking questions continued. Ms. Chan didn't step in either; she just watched waiting or hoping to see whether he would respond. Everyone could see that the Muslim guy was totally broken. Although I don't think Ms. Chan did it on purpose, I wonder why she didn't step in and protect him. I suppose sometimes it's what you don't say that reveals more about you than what you do say.

I know that Mr. G would have said something. He would have never remained silent. In fact, Mr. G always encouraged us to speak out about issues. He reserved the last class of each month for a discussion on current issues. This is the time we talk about "things that matter to us," as he would say. The conversations, however, rarely ever did. How much can you talk about your local Ombudsman or increasing taxes to fund safe injection sites or volunteering at soup kitchens? With most of these issues, you have to do something not always talk about it. Even though the conversations were kind of dull, everyone loved Mr. G for trying to make it work. One time, however, it all changed; our class discussion became real and we began to talk about student unfairness in school. Everyone began talking; even Harinder, who always seemed either disinterested or preoccupied about something else, piped in. The rants were all over the place: Teachers don't care about us; they all pile homework at the same time; they favour some students but not others; they talk at us not with us; and so on. That's when Harinder began to talk. He didn't raise his hand; he looked at Mr. G and just began to talk. His voice didn't match the short "I don't know, I didn't do it, and I don't have it" that we had heard all year. When everyone realized Harinder was speaking (actual quote below), there was silence.

Last month we were doing dance in PE; we were having fun and stuff. They started to play country music and there was a roar [of

laughter]. I did a dance move that was a bit funny with my foot—I shucked my foot up and down—and everyone started to howl even louder. Mr. Richards stopped everything and asked me to go outside. I’m like, I’m just having fun, I’m dancing. He takes me outside and gets mad at me. I try to explain to him that it was nothing but he gets even madder for some reason and tells me to go to the office. Actually, he told me to go wait outside the office. Even though I was pissed, I went. After a couple of minutes, he comes and starts yelling at me: “I asked you to go inside the office!” I told him, “No you didn’t; you told me to go outside the office.” We got into this big argument over something this small and stupid. He then takes me inside and sits me down and gives me a paper and pen and tells me to write down everything that I did wrong. The first time, I wrote down that I didn’t do anything wrong and explained to him how unfair he was to me. He read it and said:

“If this is what you are going to go with, then we can call your parents to school and sit down with the principal and go over this whole matter, or I can give you another new piece of paper and you can write down what you actually did wrong and then we can just forget about the whole thing.”

Because I had got in trouble a little bit ago, and I didn’t want to get into more trouble, I wrote down pretty much a whole bunch of bullshit just so that he could let me go. I wrote down that I was wrong and I did a stupid dance ... basically everything that he wanted to hear.

Everyone looked at Mr. G at the same time. His eyes were on the ground. He took a deep breath, looked up, and calmly said, “Has anyone else had a similar experience?”

There was a short silence like the dumb space you get in between two songs in a CD.

There was a rush of “yeahs.” Mr. G had to remind, “One at a time, c’mon people.”

Nav’s voice (first of actual quotes from students) won:

In science class, my phone rang accidentally, actually it was my alarm that went off and Mr. Rubell takes my phone away and sent me to the office and a couple of days before this other White girl’s phone rang and he gives the phone back to her at the end of the class. He doesn’t say anything to her.

Before Nav could finish, Sadhu chimes in:

In my science class there was a relatively smart boy and the teacher would give him extension if he needed it; but for Brown boys, you can ask and ask and you wouldn't get an extension. Its coz they don't think you are smart or trying so why give an extension

Then, Gurjit:

One day I wasn't feeling well and I needed some Advil so I asked if I could get some, but Mr. Freney thought I would go wander the halls or something so he tells me you need to come back. If you aren't back in 10 minutes I'll call the principal. Yeah, what else, the message was that the teacher didn't trust me or anyone else who is Brown!

Anil:

Another time when we were going on a field trip, I walked in with a can of pop and the teacher made me spill it out and when I went back there were, like, 10 Asian and White kids with cans of pop.

It was like a town hall meeting. Mr. G listened until the bell rang. Many who didn't normally talk, talked. Talk of outrage. Talk of blame. Talk of inequity. Talk of miscarriage. Mr. G didn't talk. He didn't say anything. I thought he would say something but he didn't. He didn't even bring it up during the next class. All we did was continue talking about globalization, the unit that we had been working on for the past month. Surely, I thought he would devote the next current issues class to our deluge. But he didn't. He introduced another current issue—something about torture in the Middle East—and that was that. Pandora was back in her box. It was clear that Mr. G didn't really care that she was out.

On second thought, maybe he did. Maybe he did care. Maybe Mr. G's hands were tied. Maybe he couldn't really do anything because he worked with these same teachers

who had allegedly wronged so many who were rabid in that now unspoken-about class discussion. Maybe he did stand up and did bring it up with the other teachers.

Or, maybe he only cares about big injustices and ours were small and laughable. Or, maybe he doesn't really care. Maybe it is easier to say something is unjust than to really do something about it.

That's when it hit me. Mr. G wasn't really like my dad at all. Mr. G didn't do anything about what we, as a class, thought were wrongs. He remained silent. He didn't say anything to us. Not one thing. Being silent made the whole thing a mirage. I now question in my mind what really happened that day. In fact, I now question everything Mr. G has every told us. What does the guy really stand for? The more I think about it, the more I feel angry and betrayed. He spoke intensely against all the injustices that have happened in history. The Holocaust, witch burnings, Komagata Maru, Rwanda, Guantanamo Bay... He went on and on about those and more. When it was about us, in the present, he turned cold.

Sometimes it's what you don't say that reveals more about you than what you do say.

I really wish he did say something. Even if he had told us all that we were wrong, that we were being paranoid, that we were exaggerating, that we were delusional, it would have been better than pretending nothing happened.

So much to unpack from this narrative. Let me comment on a few points that speak to identity directly in this section. Other issues that surface from this narrative, I will comment on in other sections. The first point: Although it may not be directly evident in the narrative, Sukh considers himself a "Smart" young man. Others who took

the same position as Sukh may have commented on their academic achievements more evidently, Sukh, however, displayed it in more implicit ways. Sukh did so by the way he talked: His use of thoughtful vocabulary; his constant reference and analysis of social justice for all; and his confidence in storytelling his family's past are among some examples. Nevertheless, all the boys in this identity category who took this position had no reservations of considering themselves "Smart." Unlike the other "Smart" South Asian boys, this group did not disassociate themselves from the Brown boys or other South Asian students in that school, which is the second point I want to emphasize. They saw themselves as sharing a similar ethnicity, although they did not specify how. Sukh and others, who took a similar position, believed that South Asian students were treated differently. In school, they were able to observe and hear, first hand, from the marginalized South Asian students of the abuses. They also saw examples of injustices to South Asians in the wider community and in the media. When Sukh began sharing his thoughts with me, he praised both his dad and Mr. Greentree for their resolve to calling out injustices. He saw Mr. Greentree, in his social studies class, not vacillating about historical injustices. He admired Mr. Greentree for his no nonsense approach for labeling a wrong—even if it was a Canadian wrong. He had plenty of occasions to observe his dad stand up for what was right. He chooses to chronicle an incident that he experienced with his dad and mom on the bus when he was young. The incident had clearly shaped his thinking. He had witnessed the scourge of racism up close and was terrified. He watched his dad stand up for an elderly couple who were mercilessly tormented on the bus. Although he chose not to comment or even acknowledge his dad's equally racist reactions, he was proud of his dad's courage and resolve to stand up to an obvious wrong.

As Sukh re-told his story about the injustice on the bus, he began to re-frame and re-consider Mr. Greentree's—his favourite teacher—commitment to social justice. He began to realize that, actually, Mr. Greentree only *spoke* about injustices. He labeled injustices of the past. And he did so admirably, unequivocally. However, when it came to *acting* on any injustices, he began to realize that Mr. Greentree was disturbingly silent. Sukh recollected a time when in his social studies class, many of the students complained of the injustices they had experienced in the school. He, too, had seen these happen first hand. He heard many of the South Asian boys complain about how they were treated. Some South Asian boys, who normally never shared anything, opened up and told their story. Surely, he thought Mr. Greentree would now do something about it. After all, he was a staunch advocate for social justice. However, it became evident to him, as he continued sharing his story with me, that Mr. Greentree did not do anything—at least that he knew of. He reluctantly gave Mr. Greentree some leeway, stating that he may have addressed it privately with his colleagues. Sukh was visibly torn. He simply did not want to see his favourite teacher in a negative light. He tried desperately to defend him, but as he did he could not excise from his mind Mr. Greentree's treason of silence. "But he didn't say anything to us. I can't believe that!" Mr. Greentree's ostensible lack of acknowledgment toward his students, who so candidly shared with him their personal wounds in the class, was a betrayal. This was not worthy of admiration. Mr. Greentree, now, was not worthy of admiration. In fact, by the end of the interview, Sukh questioned whether Mr. Greentree was complicit in the alienation and mistreatment that many of the South Asian boys had voiced. His growing despondency was a burden I began to carry with me for the rest of the study.

As I have already mentioned, in an effort to illustrate how the theoretical frameworks that I examined in Chapter 2 constantly informs the interpretation and analysis of this inquiry, I will at various points of this dissertation, attempt to make the connections explicit. This is one such point. Sukh's re-framing and re-interpretation of his experience with Mr. Greentree is an excellent illustration of the post positivist realist theory's fourth claim of identity construction, which I examined in Chapter 2. To restate, the fourth major claim of a post positivist realist theory of identity states that there is a cognitive element to identity formation. That is, since there is a cognitive element to experience—the first major claim—and experiences influence the formation of identities—the second major claim—one can conclude, then, that cognition plays an integral role in construction of identity. As individuals re-describe or re-interpret their experiences with their perpetually reconstituted and reflexive epistemological frameworks, they may change, in varying degrees, their views of themselves, others, or their circumstances. In other words, as individuals re-think and re-interpret their experiences, they re-fashion their own identities and worldviews. They can remake themselves by re-interpreting their experiences. This is why references of the fluidity and mutability of identities are so ubiquitous in current social science and educational scholarship. Dismissing the indeterminacy of identities as a discursive phenomenon is an unfair and incomplete argument levelled by critics of postmodern thought. Identities are mutable, fluid, contradictory, and always “in production” (Hall, 1990) not only because they reside at the discursive level, but because they are reconfigured and reconstituted by the cognitive processes that apparently characterize the genius of human beings.

For Sukh then, I witnessed a reshaping of his identity. As I noted, it was an angst-filled process for him. He had to shed his old beliefs of Mr. Greentree as a hero of social justice. After narrating, and thus re-examining, the events that he and his peers experienced in that remarkable classroom discussion, he realized, painfully, that the way he viewed Mr. Greentree was faulty and ill-informed. With new eyes, born of many variables—some of which include a collection of new experiences, an evolving epistemological framework, maturing cognitive abilities, and a dialogical exchange with me—Sukh now saw in his image of Mr. Greentree, defects that marred his teacher’s once consummate character. For Sukh, Mr. Greentree no longer stood side by side with his dad garlanded with the honor of defending justice. He shrank to someone who talked about social justice but never really acted on it. In Sukh’s own words, “He only *talked* about giving soup to the homeless rather than going down to the kitchen and actually *giving* soup to the homeless.” Sukh’s refashioned perspective of Mr. Greentree serves as a small window for us to glimpse into the cognitive nature of identity formation.

Newly Arrived Immigrants From the Indian Subcontinent

My inquiry with South Asian and non-South Asian students revealed that both South Asian boys and girls who were recent immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent were referred to with derogatory terms such as FOBs or “Fresh off the boats,” “P-dubs,” “Puns,” “Dippers, or “Pakis.” Some of these terms were used as descriptors, others as accusations. Some were barely audible, rolled up in a whisper; others, forceful, travelling in spit. Not all of the interviewed students used all these derogatory words. Some were more popular than others. The most frequently used terms were FOB and Dipper. In any case, throughout all my interviews and observations, all of these words at one point or

another were used to refer to students who had recently arrived from the Indian Subcontinent.

The newly arrived South Asian boys were positioned in many ways and, as expected, differently by different groups. Once again, I must emphasize, the positions that I describe below are not definitive or categorical in any way; my claims below are not universal representations of all the students or teachers interviewed. The various positions represent to some degree clusters of common attitudes, thoughts, descriptors, feelings, proclivities, and stories of the various interviewees and participants who were observed over a period of time. My objective is in no way to draw boundaries around these students and fix them in positions that bind them to a specific identity. Instead, my objective is to best capture in words how these students are seen and represented by others who live amongst them in Montclair High School in relation to their schooling experiences. My obligation as a narrative inquirer, as I stated earlier, is “to create the appearance of ‘experience,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life” (Langer quoted in Ely, 2007; p. 575).

One of the positions that emerged from non-South Asian students interviewed was that, unlike the Brown boys, these South Asian students were perceived as hardworking students who took their studies very seriously. Whether or not they were academically successful these students were seen as diligent and industrious, despite “all of their obvious challenges.” As one male non-South Asian student states: “They work much harder than those Brown druggies [referring to the Brown boys] and try at least to do their work.” Indeed, many of the teachers and educational leaders interviewed also

embraced this position. They, like the students who took this position, would agree with Jiwani's (2006) description of the "preferred immigrant."

The preferred immigrant fits the mould of the reasonable person. But, unlike the reasonable person, who is most likely to be born in the country and who is White, the preferred immigrant tends to be a person of colour. This person does not bring conflicts over from his/her ancestral lands of origin. In other words, such a person shows patriotic loyalty to Canada, a land that has provided many opportunities and for which s/he is grateful. ... The preferred immigrant, also law-abiding and polite, assimilates into the dominant society. The preferred immigrant leaves her/his culture behind or retains only those aspects of it that are not problematic or that can be periodically celebrated outside the closet of family and community or kept within it (p.xiv).

The newly arrived South Asian boys were definitely seen by the interviewees who took this position as the "preferred immigrant." These boys were seen as different but polite; "Other" but respectful; and strange but law-abiding. They were not anything like the Brown boys, who in my interviews with students and educators evoked a torrent of complaints and negativity. Kirk, a teacher and educational leader, states:

Indian boys from India don't quite fit; they look a little different. I think it will take some time. They don't have black puffy jackets [a direct comparison to the Brown boys]. ... but these boys are polite and very hard working. They don't fart around like those other Indo-boys do. They try to make an effort to fit in. They join the tennis club and usually make trips to the library. They don't just stand around in mobs. ... even the Iranian boys and girls; what is it that they speak—Urdu or something—and there is a whole lot of customs and cultures going on but there is not one kid who has not held an ice hockey stick. Even little Muslim girls have held a hockey stick. There is not one kid who has come from abroad that has not tried on ice skates. You know what it is? They want to make Canada work. They want to fit in.

Paul, a student who identified himself as a "generic White Canadian" states, "They [new Brown immigrants] probably feel lucky and don't usually abuse their privileges [of being in Canada] like the ones who are born here do." Unlike the Brown

boys, these newly arrived students (read: preferred immigrants), according to Kirk and Paul, do not transgress the normative rules of the society and the school. As long as they do not complain or demand anything unreasonable, they are considered an acceptable addition to Canadian society. Despite “a whole lot of cultures and customs going on” these students make an effort to be like Canadians; they pick up “hockey sticks” and “ice skates”—which are deeply cherished signifiers of what it means to be a loyal and true blue Canadian. These students’ “customs and cultures” and different languages—“what is it that they speak, Urdu or something”—are much more tolerable because they are making an effort to “fit in.” What is implied is that Canada is a benevolent and accepting country which, with her large and generous bosom, comforts immigrants who make sincere efforts to assimilate. Immigrants, who seem to adopt “Canadian” values, participate in “Canadian” culture, and “who want to make Canada work” are much more accepted. They are contrasted starkly from the “Indo-boys” who “fart around”; segregate themselves from others in the school by “stand[ing] around in mobs; and “abuse their privileges [of being Canadian].” From my analysis, these newly arrived students are not seen as a threat to Montclair High School and, generally, the fabric of our Canadian society. In fact, in the tumult of the changing social reality of Canada, they bring to the dominant culture, a degree of assurance and serve to secure and safeguard the dominant culture’s superior status in Canada’s “vertical mosaic” (Porter, 1965). Indeed, at the top of the hierarchy are the “true” Canadians characterized by their skin colour, social mobility, and the culture of power (Jiwani, 2006; Delpit, 1995). At the bottom of the hierarchy are the new immigrants, characterized by their skin colour, cultural or racial differences, and lack of social and cultural capital (Jiwani, 2006). This is the way it has

always been; this is the way it should be. The top rung is the correct place for the established “true” Canadians. And the bottom few rungs are the correct place for the newly arrived immigrants, who after all should be grateful for even being accepted in this hospitable and generous country. As long as the new immigrants make an effort to assimilate and do not disrupt the cherished values that have undergirded Canadian society since Confederation, they remain in good standing within the hierarchy. They can never, of course, graduate to the same top ranking status of the “true” Canadians; however, if they are law-abiding, deferential, and forever grateful to Canada’s benevolence, they will be viewed with paternal favorability.

Another group of non-South Asian students, who were interviewed, positioned the recently arrived students to Canada very differently. They positioned them as inferior, uncivilized, and dirty. Two students share their thoughts:

Their lives weren’t good from where they are from; they probably saw a lot of poverty or maybe one of their family members died of disease so they decided to come here. To come here and to see all this [student points to a nearby computer, his cell phone sitting atop of the table in front of him and his iPod dangling from the belt loops of his jeans] must be a shock! They’ve probably never seen this kinda stuff. It must blow them away. (Jack)

They come to school and speak Punjabi all the time and don’t realize that they are isolating themselves. They have no fashion sense. ... They smell of curry and dry their clothes outside their home window or stairs [involuntarily begins to scrunch his nose and face to show disgust but, for whatever reason, catches himself and immediately smoothes out his expression]. ... Shouting in Punjabi on the bus or in stores is just wrong. (Henry)

The position that this group of students has taken closely resembles the discourse on immigration so prevalent in social sciences and educational literature (Thobani, 2000;

Fleras and Kunz, 2001; Jiwani, 2006; Henry et al., 1995). Jiwani (2006), once again, is concise:

The discourse of immigration itself has become racialized. Hence, the term “immigrant” is probably constructed as referring to a person of color. More telling are the connotations of inferiority associated with the stereotypical immigrant who is seen as a recent arrival from a poverty-stricken Third World country, bound to a traditional culture, and unable to speak the dominant language. This stereotype seeps into and is mutually reinforced by images of the so-called developing nations, which are consistently portrayed as impoverished, war-torn, and famine-stricken areas with little or no structure of law and order. (p.48)

Both Henry and Jack would concur with Jiwani’s portrayal of the stereotypical immigrant. According to them and the group of students who also took this position, these recently arrived immigrants came from countries that are under-developed, diseased, and technologically impoverished. Students and their families from these types of countries do not know what it means to live in Canadian society. They are resented for bringing their boorish and undignified ways of living to Canada. In fact, by doing so, they seem to contaminate the sophisticated and refined social and aesthetic landscape of Canada, as evidenced by Henry’s revulsion of the smell of curry, clothes drying outside of stairs, or “shouting” of Punjabi in buses and stores. To Henry, this kind of intrusion is “just wrong.” These two words that he uses are particularly revealing of his attitude to these newly arrived students—predominately from the Indian subcontinent. For Henry, their ways of living are not something to understand or learn. In fact, he does not use the terms “interesting,” “different,” or “diverse”—our *au courant* politically correct code words that signify a continuum of meanings that range from curiosity to repugnance. He is not subtle or strategic. He simply states that what “they” do is wrong. For Henry, there is a right way of doing things and there is a wrong way of doing things. His way—

representative of the dominant culture—is the right way; their way—representative of newly arrived immigrants—is the wrong way.

The “stereotypical immigrant,” a symbol firmly entrenched in the psyche of our society, becomes even more reviled and loathsome when he or she demands resources, whether social, intellectual, or economic that is in short supply or has already been allocated. Craig, a teacher at Montclair High School, illustrates this point poignantly. His position, embedded in the story he recounts below, depicts well that immigrants should be less demanding and more grateful to the country and institutions that have supported them. I include his thoughts because he stated emphatically that a good majority of the staff agrees with his position. Even though none of the teachers interviewed revealed their thoughts as candidly as Craig, by their silence, non-verbal reactions, smiles, and/or coded comments, they agreed with him. When I asked one teacher in an interview directly about the issue Craig shared with me (without, of course, mentioning Craig’s name), he replied, “No comment” and smiled widely. Another teacher shifted in her chair, umm’d and aah’d and mentioned something innocuous, which she later asked me to edit out of her transcripts. Additionally, two other teachers requested me to delete from their transcripts this issue and other comments that they thought in hindsight could be “potentially hazardous for the image and morale of the school.” One more teacher only agreed to be interviewed if I did not broach certain topics that he had identified upfront. His original list did not include this issue. When I raised it for his thoughts, he said, “Include this issue in the list of issues I am not going to comment on.”

The issue, in Craig’s own words:

I’ll tell you another story; this is a really interesting story. We have a lot of Muslim kids in our school and one of the French teachers—I forgot how

—has a connection to Islam. She isn't Islamic though. One of these devout boys once came to her and said, "You know at noon, we would like to pray."

Being in this kind of cosmopolitan school, what are you going to do? So she said, "I tell you what, my room is kind of sheltered from the main school so, sure, you can use it."

Her room then became a place where more of the devout Islamic kids would pray. It became a ritual. Ok. I don't know for how long but Ok. No problem. [*His eyes, voice, and body language shows that he is irritated but intimates that there is something worse to come*]. Then we got some more Islamic students transfer into our school and the dynamic of all this becomes very interesting. In short, upon hearing that one group of Muslims had a place to pray, these new Muslim students now *demand* [Craig stresses word] that they too should be allowed to enter that room to pray! Jeez—look they just escaped from Iraq and a *Church* [emphasizes the word] brought them over even though they are Muslims.

So, in another room next to this now, "prayer room" [gestures inverted commas], there were some female teachers having lunch. The story now gets even more interesting. They were going to the *Rolling Stones* concert that night, so while having their lunches they were playing a bit of the *Stones* to pump themselves up. One of these little Muslim girls comes into their room and says, "You will need to be quiet, we are praying next door."

Well, well, well! You can imagine that didn't sit very well with these teachers. EXCUSE ME girls—just pray! [Shouts this last sentence in absolute incredulity] Can you imagine! [Slams fist on the table and laughs in jest] Can you imagine how much it must have ruffled the teachers' feathers? Anyways, the story gets kinda complicated and now the admin are involved. In a meeting [about this issue], thank god one of the admin says, "We might be going down a slippery slope here coz we have Jewish kids here, obviously a number of Indo kids, we have every religion that you can think of here, so, are we going to honor all of them?" Can a Christian club have a room? [Exasperated as he says this and then rolls his eyes]. C'mon, you know! They don't; of course they don't! And in this day and age, they even couldn't. So, we, as a school kind of nipped that in the bud right there and then.

When you think about it, you can see where these Muslim students were going with this. Pretty soon, you can imagine that entire community all joining together and saying, "Well, you must provide us with a room" and then pressuring the school board, and then eventually the media that "Oh, you are racist and that you are anti-Muslim."

It isn't an issue anymore. Nope. Not an issue anymore [raises eyebrows in a gesture of smugness]. You can really catch yourself getting caught up in all of this.

Anish: What were the impressions of some of the other teachers at the school? Did they—all of you—collectively agree with this direction?

Well, we were all kind of outraged by the whole thing. The audacity of it all! Secretly, most of us thought that well, you know, you have only been here for 8 weeks— everybody is supporting you, this whole country is supporting you completely— and you know, maybe you all should kinda-like be grateful! C'mon. Where is the mystery in that?

Well, now the little Muslim girls' and boys' mommies and daddies get into it. They, too, are like very demanding. I find that very interesting. [No transition; Craig moves right into this next sentence] You know it is strange; we have so many cultures here. We do so much for all the cultures. We have an international day, where kids organize this event and bring foods from home and everyone can buy it and fundraise for something—I'm not sure right now for what but I know it is for a big day. We have Diwali here too; there are dance groups, and *that's* [emphasizes] really cool. We have a fashion show and they don't just do North American fashions; they do saris and other stuff. Some of those kids are just beautiful when they dress up like that; all decked out in their traditional garb. Not only that but even during grad we play Sikh music, which I really like. Like Sikh rock, which is really cool—what's it called—Bhangrah or something like that! I'm out there [Craig gestures as if he is dancing]. It isn't a pretty sight [the dancing] but I'm out there. I want them to know that I am a person and that I am celebrating with them. So, with all the celebrations that we, as a school, focus on, how can *anyone* [emphasizes] complain that we do not believe in supporting their ways?

Craig is appalled at these newly arrived Muslim students who demand that his colleagues, who are listening to music in a room next door, be quiet because they are praying. He is outraged by these students impudence: How could they possibly think it was appropriate to ask teachers to turn down the volume on their CD player so that they could pray in quiet? He claims that most of his colleagues, too, although they wouldn't say it out loud, found this act a disgraceful affront. Instead of being grateful for all the

support that these newly arrived Muslims students were receiving, Craig and his colleagues believed that these students began imposing their own values and practices onto the very people who were supporting them. Unlike the “preferred immigrant” who knew “his place,” these demanding immigrants did not have a clue about “their place.” The school, Craig vented, rightly or wrongly allowed these Muslim students to pray during their lunch hour; instead of being grateful for this privilege, these students were behaving as though it was their right. He found it preposterous that these students would want to restrict the enjoyment his colleagues were experiencing in the next room. For Craig and his colleagues, how is it possible that privileges granted to immigrants become rights, which then, incredulously, impinges on the rights of the majority both in the school and society? Instead of feeling grateful for what they have been given and realizing their own limits, why do these immigrants feel entitled to trespass on the rights of the majority? So much more can be unpacked from this robust story but, I think, the conviction of the unreasonably demanding and ungrateful immigrant has been sufficiently illustrated.

The majority of the students from Montclair High School who recently arrived from the Indian subcontinent did not associate with the Brown boys for two possible reasons. The first possible reason that emerged from the study was that they were much maligned and even ostracized by the Brown boys. The second possible reason was that they found the values of the Brown boys contradictory and, in fact, baffling to their own. The following anecdote from a self-identified “new immigrant” from India captures the sentiments of the first possible reason.

Those Brown guys [Brown boys] even look at me funny like I no belong here. They think that India is a dirty place but this is not a

true fact. They think that they [Brown boys] only allowed living in Canada and that we people are dirtying up this place. If they not talk to us that is ok but don't look at us like we are dirty. You know, White people here treat me better than them."

This group of newly arrived students was shocked, hurt, and generally disgusted by the treatment they received from the Brown boys. From many of their comments, it seemed that they were very aware that once they entered a new country they would have to brace themselves for some kind of mistreatment. Whether it was some form of name-calling or outright racism they knew, for whatever reason, that they would be treated differently. They certainly did not expect, however, the maltreatment that they experienced directed from "people of our own kind," as one student stated. They expected it from the "Whites" as another student explains: "Sometimes they thinks [sic] that we take over their property [land/country] so they shout at us names." However, when many of these students experienced out-an-out resentment and acrimony from the Brown boys, they were confounded. So much so, they were quick to point out that the treatment that they received from many of the "White" students was far better than that of the Brown boys. One student attempted to describe this bewilderment by borrowing from a proverb that he had recently learned in his emerging English: "He suppose [sic] to scratch my back, like I want to scratch his back because we both are same kind of people. But he no scratch my back, he try to stab my back."

The second possible reason that the newly arrived immigrants did not associate with the Brown boys was because of a perceived clash in priorities and perhaps even value systems. In the words of another self-identified new immigrant from India:

The rough Brown guys just want to have fun. They just want to fool around. In India it is much stricter and much harder. You can't just fool around. ... I don't hang around with the Brown guys here;

I don't have time for that. They like to do things that I don't. I study hard and I am doing well but I have a tough time making friends with them [Brown crew] because they don't treat me nice. I don't want to be like them. [Mahesh]

Many of these students, who for the most part, chose not to associate with the Brown boys made this decision because they were appalled at the Brown boys' choice of priorities. They felt that the Brown boys did not take school seriously and that their lackadaisical attitude toward their studies was a serious impediment for their future. They consistently referenced India and how their formal school system would never tolerate the kinds of behaviours that this school was obviously accepting from not only the Brown boys but other misbehaving students. In India, according to these students, anyone who challenged authority, did not complete his homework, or showed a general disregard toward his studies would be stringently disciplined or even expelled from school. Garjan, a student who shared the beliefs of this group elaborates:

In India it was very different than here. Your teachers were more stricter than here. You couldn't speak back to them. If you did you would be punished or expelled. Here the teachers don't care too much about your education or maybe they don't care about these guys [Brown boys].

It did not take long for these students to determine the reputation of the Brown boys in the school and as a result decided not to associate with them. They saw themselves as responsible and serious students willing to do their best to succeed. They understood too well that if they associated with the Brown boys—assuming, of course, that the Brown boys would let them—they, too, would be seen in the same negative light. This, to them, was unacceptable.

Garjan's last sentence is penetrating: "Here the teachers don't care too much about your education or maybe they don't care about these guys [Brown boys]." For

Garjan, teachers who care about school or students' education would not accept any student transgressions. This, for him, was a non-negotiable truism. Caring teachers help students in any way possible. Part of caring is to identify where a student is going astray and guide him back on track. If the guiding takes the form of a consequence or punishment—all the better. For Garjan to see so much misbehaviour in this school tolerated, ignored, or even worse accepted, was a sign that teachers did not care about one of two things. Either they did not care too much about their jobs as teachers or they did not care about the Brown boys. For him, it had to be one of these two possible explanations. He could not comprehend that the teachers could care about teaching and still allow some students—in this case Brown boys—to misbehave without experiencing consequences that he deemed severe enough to act as a deterrent. Allowing the Brown boys to ride roughshod over teachers or permitting these Brown boys to continue attending classes despite their apathetic or insolent attitude toward school was a clear symptom, to Garjan, that the teachers at Montclair High School weren't committed to teaching.

This perceived clash in priorities and possibly even value systems that the recently arrived immigrants experienced toward the Brown boys manifested itself in another form too. One recently arrived South Asian student, Ali, who vehemently distinguished himself from “those other hardcore Brown boys [whom] I don't hang out with,” stated

Like if someone [Brown boys] does something wrong, in their family they may not get into trouble but in my family, if I do something wrong, then I will get in a lot of trouble ... my parents always tell me that you always have to do hard work to be successful. That kinda attitude rubs down to me ... they [parents] make sure that I am doing good and so I make sure that I do good.

Other South Asian students in this category, regardless of the positions they took, also brought up the guiding influence of their families. They spoke of their families as “conscience checks” and as people whom they cared about and did not want to “let down” or “hurt.” Aman was passionate when he shared the following thought with me:

How do you face your parents when you keep screwing up? How do you look at them in the eyes and say “yeah, I blew up the toilet” or “yeah, I pulled the fire alarm for fun”? Don’t they care what their parents say? Or don’t their parents care? C’mon, you gotta somewhere in your heart. You must be pretty cold if you don’t.”

Questioning the Brown boys care and devotion to their parents was another way that these recently arrived South Asian students fashioned their identities in opposition to the Brown boys. As they questioned, they did so more as a way of fathoming a violation of a fundamental tenant of family life. How could these boys not care about their parents’ feelings? Obviously, they assumed that these Brown boys parents, like their own parents, would be ashamed of their sons’ behaviours. And if they weren’t, why weren’t they? Why did the Brown boys “seem” to disregard this unspoken loyalty to their parents? How could they not bring shame to their families if they behaved so disrespectfully or did so poorly, academically, in school? Did they not feel guilty for creating this shame? Most of the South Asian students in this category “read” the Brown boys actions through the lens of their own family experience.

Quiet Brown Guys

Quiet Brown guys is the default or catch-all category for the South Asian boys who do not fall into the other three categories. They are Brown guys who are not

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, a priori themes are part of the attributes of the phenomenon under study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003); they influence how field texts are collected, read,

associated with anything in particular; as Julie, a “White” female student describes: “They are just there; they’re not really into sports or student council or other school activities.” These South Asian boys are consistently described as not intimidating, mean, or scary but “just there.” Julie, once again:

You kinda don’t see these Brown guys anywhere once your class is over. They are the ones that when you look at your year book you say, ‘was he really in my grade’ or if someone in the school goes missing or is kidnapped or is in a helicopter accident and you see his face on the news, you would hear people at the school say, ‘oh, he was a quiet kinda guy or he basically kept to himself or he did his own thing’ because you have really nothing to say about him [laughs with verve].

These students were invisible; strangely, Brown but invisible. Even though they were inconspicuous in the school—no one seemed to pay much attention to them or their behaviours—their skin color was of significance. They were definitely

and written. They may privilege some observations, field texts, or stories while allowing others to fade to the background. This sub-theme of family shame as a deterrent for student misbehaviour was one such occasion. Each time I heard an interviewee position a South Asian student as a new immigrant or position him or herself as a newly arrived immigrant, images of my own experiences, as a refugee, began to impair and even narrow the arc of my research-scape. It was my interview with Henry, in particular, that began the cascade of memories. As I mentioned above, Henry viewed newly arrived immigrants as uncouth, unsophisticated, and uncivilized. He shared with me his repugnance for the smell of curry: “They smell of curry and dry their clothes outside their home window or stairs.” When Henry’s nose involuntarily creased at the thought of curry, a long buried humiliation—lodged in a crease of my mind—broke free.

After a botched attempt at writing a précis, Ms. Njaa, my grade five English teacher pulled

racialized. Nevertheless, they did not fit into the three general categories of what it meant to be Brown in this school. They did not have a recognizable accent as did many of the newly arrived South Asian boys. They weren't on the honor roll as were many of the "Smart" South Asian boys. And, they weren't seen waiting outside the office of the principal or vice-principal as were the Brown boys. They did not seem to have any defining characteristics that were worthy of a nameable identity. Interestingly, even though they did not have a distinguishing identity category, they were still seen as "Brown." They were still an "Other."

Revisiting Julie's quote above, even though she attempts to explain that these students were unassuming and they "fly under the radar," she still makes it explicit that they are Brown. They were not like the non-descript White or Asian guys. Intriguingly, even non-descript or undefined male students were racialized.

me aside and threatened that I would never make anything of my life if I continued to flounder in English. Weeks later, frustrated by the gnarled fibres that ran through my sentences and even more so with my shallow familiarity with "basic vocabulary," Ms. Njaa summoned me to the back of the class. As I gathered my belongings to move to the back desk, she added: "Pick up the dictionary on your way and start memorizing every word. Start with "A" on page 1!" Even Charlie Tippet, who did not know his times table or that people in Africa don't live in trees, snickered. Later that day and then every time he saw me in the hall, he and his mates would walk by me singing the alphabet song. They never made it to "Z" before dissolving in laughter. Z, however, is where I started reading and memorizing the dictionary. Since there were fewer words that began with "Z" than with "A," it made my task of memorization surmountable.

The following year, Mr. Wellman, my grade six English teacher made us read passages of

This category is a problematic one. It is more the creation of a category that is based on a lack of information than anything else. Even though many students who were interviewed categorized these South Asian students as quiet and unexceptional, maybe if I challenged or pressed them, they would have elaborated further on how they specifically saw these South Asian students. Perhaps if my study had focused on these “Quiet” South Asian students, I would have learned that there are, in fact, a constellation of identities associated with them. Perhaps I would have found that there exists nuances in their identities that currently elude this study. For now, however, I resort to this catch-all category that serves more as a default category due to the limits of this study.

The only hard word was *touché*, which I had, thankfully, just read in my Funk and Wagnalls’ dictionary at home last week. From “Z,” I was now at “T’s.” I would have been at the “S’s” if I was “serious”—as my dad liked to put it—during the summer; instead, the allure of street hockey—on an actual street—won out that year.

our class novel out loud. Up and down the rows he went; each student responsible for one paragraph. As usual, I did what I always did: Count the number of students ahead of me. With the number spinning on my tongue, I quickly counted the number of paragraphs until I reached the one that I had to conquer. Next, always in a panic, I would scour through all the words in my paragraph praying to Allah that I recognized all of them. Depending on the length and difficulty of my paragraph, I would begin reading the next two paragraphs. Sometimes, if Mr. Wellman liked the way Amanda or Sophia read, he would ask either one or both of them to continue reading for another paragraph. This unpredictability would throw off my calculations; hence, a backup plan was necessary. On this occasion, however, I was not there yet; when I looked at my potential paragraph, my eyes danced in recognition.

My heart raced. I lost track, as I usually did, of what was being read. Instead, I imagined that Mr. Wellman would be impressed with my knowledge and pronunciation of the word and ask me to read one more paragraph. As I began to prepare for the next paragraph, Mr. Wellman called out my name. It was now my turn. I looked at the paragraph and noticed that *touché* was bigger than any other word in that paragraph; I could not wait to introduce that word to the class. I fumbled on the pronunciation of *read*. Mr. Wellman corrected me: "red"; I had said "reed." It didn't matter, *touché* was up next. After *touché*, no one would remember *reed*. As the word leapt out of my mouth, I waited a split second for Mr. Wellman to acknowledge or congratulate me. Sometimes, when a student scaled a tough word, Mr. Wellman would stop the reading and make a big deal. I waited. All Mr. Wellman said, in a voice of resignation, was "touchy." I didn't really care how much I bungled the remaining few words.

I decided to quit school. Clearly, I wasn't smart enough. I knew that it was against the law but I also knew that there were many ways to quit school but still attend.

All this happened the same day that the garbage men were late for their weekly garbage pick-up. Normally, they arrived in the morning; today, they arrived just as I got home from school. As the garbage truck pulled up into our alley, I watched mom race out of our home worried that she was going to miss them. I didn't notice anything in her hands though; there were no last minute garbage bags to dump. Our two full garbage cans stood neatly waiting to be emptied. The garbage man didn't get off the back step of the truck like he had just done for the houses before ours; he simply stood there hanging. He glanced at my mom. The garbage truck driver looked at her through the wedge of his side view mirror. These were her cues to pick up one of the two garbage cans and empty it into the open mouth of the truck. She did the same for the second can. As the truck grinded on, I heard peals of laughter, which I discovered years later from my mom, were much tamer than the roars of laughter that had erupted on previous occasions. Seething, when she

recounted this and other similar stories, my mom spewed that those garbage men would fall off their truck laughing so hard as they watched her struggle to dump her own garbage. "If I didn't do it," she seared, "they wouldn't pick up our garbage. They would just let it pile up!" "One time," she continued, "they looked at what was falling from my dustbin and one of the man [sic] said: 'Your curry food stinks more bad than anything else inside here.'"

It is said that if shame is intense enough it outlives anyone it touches. I decided not to quit school. I didn't know why then. Much later, I knew it had to do with shame. I reasoned the success my parents expected of me would outlive their shame.

As I heard Henry speak, I wondered if he was the grandson of that garbage man, whose ignominy I had managed to forgive over the years. Henry's comments invoked the broil of the red coals of anger that smoldered invisibly in me for years after that incident. In the days after my interview with Henry, I had to disassociate him from Anish's phantasmagoric garbage men. To facilitate this process, among other things, I re-played Henry's interview recording several times; with each listen, I finally heard, in all his fullness, a seventeen year old White male adolescent sharing his world view at a particular moment in his life.

The Brown Boys or Brown Crew

In this chapter, I described three of the four categories of South Asian male students positioned at Montclair High School: The smart Brown guys, new immigrants, and quiet Brown boys. The focus of this study, however, was on a group of South Asian students who refer to themselves as the Brown crew and whom the educators at Montclair High School and non-Asian students refer to as the Brown boys. They are the disaffected students who are purported to experience disproportionate academic failure and disciplinary measures. In the next five chapters I examine in detail how *the Brown boys*

or Brown crew at Montclair High School are positioned and how they position their identities.

6. THE BROWN BOYS OR BROWN CREW

This study focuses on a group of disaffected South Asian male students who are purported to experience disproportionate academic failure and encounter excessive disciplinary measures. In the last chapter, I examined the “smart” Brown guys, new immigrants, and “quiet” Brown boys. In this chapter, I examine in detail how the identities of the Brown boys or the disaffected group of South Asian male students at Montclair High School is positioned and how they position their own identities by “reading” the research data through the theoretical lenses of postmodernist and post-positivist realist theory of identity. I also use Hall’s (1997b) instructive definition of identities—“the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves ...” (p. 52)—to navigate this discussion. The “names,” I use below are exactly the identity terms that were used by this group of South Asian male students to position themselves and others within their group. Once again, I restate—as I have done throughout this dissertation—these “names” are discursive categories used for purposes of examination, inquiry, and analysis in this study. The category descriptors are not hard and fast labels affixed to any one type of student or group for the purposes of essentializing or stereotyping. Rather, they serve as mirrors reflecting back the lived experiences of this particular group of disaffected South Asian male students at Montclair High School.

The majority of the non-South Asian students used the terms *Brown guys* or *Brown boys* to refer to or describe South Asian boys. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, non-South Asian students, who were cognizant of the heterogeneity within and amongst the South Asian population, had a tendency to classify South Asian male

students as *Smart Brown guys*, *New Immigrants*, *Quiet Brown guys*, and *Brown crew* or *the Brown boys*. Of the thirteen non-South Asian educators and educational leaders, nine used the terms *Indo-Canadian males* when referring to South Asian male students at the school. Two of these nine educators—one a vice-principal—used the term *Indo-boys* to specifically reference the disaffected group of South Asian males. The other four educators and educational leaders used the term *Brown guys* or *Brown boys*. The term “South Asian” had minimal currency and was regularly used by only one South Asian teacher and by a few other teachers and students interviewees *after* I consciously referenced the students as South Asian. The other South Asian teachers used the term *Brown guys* or *Brown boys*. All of the South Asian male students who were not ostensibly categorized as *Smart Brown guys*, *New Immigrants*, and *Quiet Brown guys* referred to themselves or others in their group as *Brown boys* or *Brown crew*. This epithet of *Brown boys* was further categorized into two other identity constructs of *wannabe Brown boys* and *hardcore Brown boys*, which I will clarify later on this chapter.

I must underline, each of the participants interviewed was asked to share his or her understanding of the terms *Brown boy* and/or *Brown crew*. In some cases, the participants were asked directly what they understood from the terms. At other times, when the term(s) arose naturally in the conversation, I sought clarity of the context and meaning. Whether questioned explicitly or examined in the to-and-fro of dialogue, at one point in every interview, I invited discussion around these terms.

Participants throughout this study used the terms *Indo-Canadian*, *Indo-boys*, *South Asian*, *Brown boys*, or *Brown crew* in a variety of different ways. Most of the non-South Asian students interviewed used whichever identity term they employed

definitively, as though it connoted an indisputable and objective reality. Interestingly, none of the non-South Asian students interviewed explored or challenged the locus of power inherent in any of the identity terms. The disaffected South Asian male students, however, as will become evident shortly, grappled with many of these terms, and in their varied ways, critically examined the power inequities implicit in them. The educators, save the two non-South Asian teachers, wrestled with these identity terms, either acknowledging the contested nature of the terms or cautiously and deftly navigating around the political minefields wedded to them. The politics of identity terminology was not the focus of this study; however, from the field texts I was able to gather, I can make a few assertions that would be representative of the majority of the educators and students I interviewed. Below, I unpack each term and the context associated with it, systematically.

Indo-Canadian

Anish: Based on what we have talked about [examination of the terms identity, culture, religion, and student], what words or terms do you use to represent yourself?

Jiwan: I am Canadian but I *always* say I am Brown.

Anish: Why?

Jiwan: [Laughs] Because I am colored. If I go [say] to someone 'I am Canadian', they [sic] will ask me 'Canadian-what'? They won't believe that I am *just* Canadian. So, I might as well skip that step and say that I am Brown.

Anish: So who would be just Canadian?

Jiwan: White people of course. I do believe that it is a stereotype and it is easy to attach White to Canadian but I know it's not true. It's just easier to understand.

Jiwan's pithy comment is rich enough to fill an entire chapter. I will, however, comment on his most salient point. Jiwan finds it difficult to claim a national identity without disclosing his cultural or ethnic allegiances; hence to avoid all the questions and discussions—which he claims is inevitable—he decides to eliminate the reference to his “Canadian” identity and his ethnic or religious identities altogether. Jiwan's thoughts poignantly capture Mathani's (2002) sentiments:

an ‘authentic’ Canadian is of either British or French blood—those ‘real’ Canadians who are part of a ‘capital—C Canadian’ society. Both these identities are read as white, or European. To be a real Canadian, it is assumed that one must be white [sic]. (p. 77)

As I examined in Chapter 3, the Whiteness of the dominant identity not only darkens the identity of the minoritized (Jiwani, 2006) but ensures that in order for the minoritized to be considered Canadian, they must “walk the hyphen” (Batth cited in Jiwani, 2006; p.127). “The burden of hyphenation, where one is seen as not solely ‘Canadian’ but ‘Canadian and fill-in-your-ethnic-background’” (Mathani, 2002; p. 79) certifies the latter will always remain a second class citizen, unworthy of being called simply “Canadian.” For these precise reasons, the majority of the South Asian males and female students, whom I interviewed, detested this hyphenated identity. The male students chose, instead, to position themselves as Brown boys or Brown crew, a point I will elaborate on below. Balbir captures the disdain toward the term “Indo-Canadian” that many of his peers felt:

I *hate* [emphasis] being called East Indian or Indo-Canadian ... My sister was telling my mom a little while back that “Indo-Canadian” means that you aren't really from Canada. She said that only White people think they are from Canada or are totally Canadian ...

As I mentioned above, nine of the thirteen educators used the term Indo-Canadian when speaking about all the South Asian males and females in the school. By the time I realized that the hyphenated identity was a sore issue with many of the South Asian students—both male and female—I had already completed interviews with six of the educators. I could not, therefore, prod their thinking around their use of the term. From a review of their interview transcripts, each one of these six educators had used the term Indo-Canadian when referring to the South Asian students. I did, however, discuss the issue with the other three educators who did use the term. Slightly abashed, Ava, an English teacher, excused her usage of the term; “now I know more about the issue” she resolved, “I won’t use that term.” My objective, of course, was not to cause her embarrassment or to solicit an apology; I simply wanted to understand her thinking around the usage of the term.

My conversation with the other two educators, George and Ridley, unfolded very differently. When I sought clarity about the use of the term Indo-Canadian, both of them lashed out at me defensively. George, first, responded by asking defensively: “Why can’t I use the term?” Once I clarified my intention, he respectfully ended that part of the interview by stating, “I can’t keep up with all the politically correct name changes. So now it’s South Asian. Ok.” Ridley, on the other hand, needed to share his perspectives. I reproduce below an excerpt of my interview with him.

Anish: I would like to take a slight detour if you don’t mind. [Ridley nods] Could you share with me your thinking around your usage of the term ‘Indo-Canadian?’ You call the boys, ‘Indo-Canadian boys.’

Ridley: Well, you call them Brown. [I interpreted his tone of voice and body reaction as defensive].

Anish: You are right, sometimes I ... [Ridley interrupts me]

Ridley: [Huffy] Well, I think it would be totally unacceptable for me to say, “Those are the White kids over there” or “Do you see those White kids all standing there talking.” I just feel uncomfortable with that kind of language. I know they relate to themselves as Brown and often they will say Brown boys but it is not unusual for me to say, “Oh you mean those five gentlemen over there” or “Those 5 Montclair students over there?” I try to steer away from that identification, that moniker, that label. I don’t feel it is appropriate to say, “Oh that Japanese kid or those Chinese kids or White kids, especially the term White kids. Once in a while—even though I have a good relationship with our Indo-Canadian students—every 2 or 3 or 4 years, some kids will say that you have a problem with Brown people. And we [staff] do hear that from time to time and I always stop the conversation right there and I say, “No, I don’t have a problem with anyone in particular. Yes, I do have a problem with what someone has done.” What I strongly do is to encourage students to look at people as human beings and not as Brown, Red, Yellow, or White people. I honestly feel uncomfortable with the term Brown people. I just don’t think it contributes to how others see each other as human beings. It is a statement of fact. We certainly wouldn’t say “Yellow people” and we would never say “White people” because we would be determined to be racist in some way. I am always careful with that and I always use the term Indo-Canadian or quite often, “Oh those five gentlemen over there, those Montclair students, or senior students.” I will always stop the conversation, when I hear Brown. Every time. Guaranteed.

Anish: Thanks for sharing that with me. Can I share with you something I have learned in this study so far? [I don’t wait for an answer] By now I have interviewed at least forty students: South Asian students, students from a European descent, Chinese students or Asian, as they commonly call themselves, and others. What I have found is that these are all definitely problematic terms. They are certainly contested terms. They cut deep into our national identity. As we evolve as a nation, we are learning that language of identification is slippery. Perhaps in the years ahead, we will be a little bit more comfortable with these terms or some other kind of terms. Why I am say all this is that in my interviews, predominately with the South Asian kids, they are the ones that label themselves as Brown boys. Interestingly enough, they call themselves the Brown crew or Brown boys. I ask them, what they would be preferred to be called and they usually say: “By my name.” We then, in my interviews, examine the term “Indo-Canadian” and almost all of them abhor that term because it is hyphenated and it makes them feel that they are not fully Canadian. So, they say, why “Indo-Canadian” instead of just “Canadian?”

Ridley: Are you asking me why?

Anish: No. Not you; they ask me. It is interesting how they see themselves; how they frame themselves. Should we ignore how they see themselves? Ridley, if someone asks you “why do we as a society, in Canada specifically, see others

with a hyphen”? How would you respond to this question, especially if a student asked you?

Ridley: Because we don't say Japanese-Canadian or Chinese-Canadian right?

Anish: Well, some do.

Ridley: I like the fact that they said to you that they liked to be called by their names. And I know they like to call themselves Brown boys. I hear it all the time. They refer to themselves, and we are talking about, well, since your research revolves around, you know, and now I don't even know which term to use is ... [rolls his eyes and throws his hands up and then laughs].

Anish: What do you want to refer to them as?

Ridley: I don't know anymore, especially after your speech. I guess I'll call them "South Asian" since it is now a popular term right?

The interview lasted another hour. From this point on, Ridley did not refer to the South Asian male students as "South Asian, Indo-boys, Indo-Canadian, or Brown boys"; he consistently called them "South East Asian boys." Ridley found it deeply problematic and disrespectful that I used the term "Brown boys." He found it just as problematic when the South Asian males, themselves, call each other "Brown boy." Ridley, who espoused a color blind approach to multiculturalism, believes that a person's identity should not be defined by the color of his or her skin. "What I strongly do is to encourage students to look at people as human beings and not as Brown, Red, Yellow, or White people." After I shared with him that many of the South Asian students whom I interviewed positioned themselves as "Brown boys" and that they abhorred the hyphenated identity—a construct that he used consistently—he grew flustered. He was shaken. Ridley's way of seeing these students and, in fact, all South Asians had changed. He was at a loss. He started to share more thoughts about the South Asian students at his school but quickly realized that he did not know how to refer to them. My "speech" had

paralyzed him. Ridley felt silenced. Again, this was in no way my intention; I simply wanted to clarify not silence. However, he did not feel or see it that way.

Interestingly and instructively, in each interview, my attempt at clarification provoked, in these three educators, an intense reaction. Although their reactions were expressed differently, they shared a common impulse: A palpable diffidence at the thought of changing the way they saw others. That is, the thought of relinquishing an old way of seeing for a different way of seeing incited in them a reaction that revealed an unnerving uncertainty. For them to let go of the “Indo-Canadian” identity construct, which they used to view or position these students, was destabilizing. They now required a different identity construct with which to see or position these students. The decision for a new identity construct, however, was not theirs to make. They were acutely aware of this fact and were powerless to do anything about it. They were not, at least ostensibly, in charge of the naming or positioning process. The three educators were aware that in this world of “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000) where antiquated beliefs of stable and fixed identities are seriously flawed and indefensible (Appadurai, 2003; Bauman, 2000; Dolby et al., 2008; Hall, 1997a, 1997b, 2000), how people position and how they are positioned are complex and highly charged processes. Increasingly, minoritized groups, especially in many of the Western countries, are taking charge of how their identities are constructed. They are realizing the importance and power of fashioning or positioning their own identity. Once Ridley, George, and Ava realized that the “Indo-Canadian” identity was a contested construct, they seemed powerless—understandably so—at the thought of sharing any more of their perspectives on the South Asian students at

Montclair High School. Until I suggested to them an alternative identity construct, they were all silenced.

Brown Boy or Brown Crew

As I stated above, the majority of the South Asian males students, whom I interviewed, disliked intensely the Indo-Canadian hyphenated identity; instead, they chose to position themselves as Brown boys or Brown crew. Below, some Brown boys explain what it means to be a “Brown boy” or part of the “Brown crew.”

For me, I guess, I am part of the Brown crew. Like, there is a group of grade 11 and 12's that are Brown and we hang together. I don't know why, coz, that's just the way it is. We are just friends. ... Most of us have cars so we go out to eat or just sit around the tables in the rotunda and hang there. So usually, you will see a whole bunch of Brown people just standing at recess or lunch.

It means a group of Brown guys that hang together. I don't know if it just means only Sikh but it does mean Brown. We walk around. We like to party. We hang at malls ... we're just comfortable with each other; we know what is going on in each other's heads not like you have to guess what is going on in a Chinese guy's head or a White guy's head.

Every Brown boy knows every other Brown person. There are guys who come to school who knows everyone's family's names and where everyone lives programmed in their heads [chuckles]. They know about everyone else; they know everything about each other; they have connections.

We're all proud to be brought up to be Indian and stuff and some guys choose to take it to another level, I guess. We want to make sure that racism and bad stuff like before doesn't [sic] happen again. To make sure, we like to prove it and stuff; like we show who has the power. If it means we have to fight, we fight; whatever it takes.

I know that everyone thinks that we get into fights, do drugs, and do other things like: vandalism, theft, stealing, breaking the laws of the land and the laws of the school, and drinking. But most of us don't. We're just Brown guys who live on the edge but always get blamed for everything.

These resolute voices are only a sample of the large number of Brown boys with whom I discussed issues of, among others, gender, ethnicity, belonging, and representation. When describing what it means to be a Brown boy, four features consistently stood out: camaraderie, skin color, numbers in a group, and power. The last two, for reasons of organization, I will discuss in Chapter 8; the first two, form the subjects of the next several paragraphs. First and most conspicuous was the inextricable link between being a Brown boy and being part of a group or crew. For all of the Brown boys I interviewed, they were friends hanging out—nothing complicated. Their relationships with each other seemed to extend well past the boundaries of the school: “they know everything about each other ... family’s names and where everyone lives [are] programmed in their heads.” They were deeply “comfortable with each other” and seemed to revel at the thought of “know[ing] what is going on in each other’s heads.” Their identities were very much informed by the identity of their crew. It seemed unthinkable for the Brown boys to describe their identities without anchoring it to their need to belong to their group of other Brown boys (Rouchy, 1995). The group identity of the Brown crew or Brown boys was internal to each individual Brown boy. The “I” of each Brown boy, existed in terms of the “we” of their group. I will elucidate some parts of this intriguing “I”—“We” dialectic in the narratives that will appear in the forthcoming chapters. Of course, an in-depth study into the group dynamics of these Brown boys—which was not a focus of my inquiry—would have definitely yielded more meanings and insight; nevertheless, the data that I was able to gather certainly did demonstrate the centrality of group identity in what it means to be a Brown boy.

Second, Brown skin was a marker that cut across every conversation I had with the Brown boys. As skin color, Brown certainly marked their difference from others in the school. However, for these Brown boys, Brown was more than skin color; it became an emblem to show all others that times had changed. Brown, for them, no longer meant inferiority. Brown no longer meant ugly. Brown no longer meant subservient. Perhaps at one time—during their parents’ and grandparents’ time—these stereotypes existed. Perhaps, for whatever reason, as Nav states: “our parents and your generation [referring to me] couldn’t do anything about all this racism and prejudice ... but we will never accept this type of treatment ... we are proud of being Brown.” Let me take a step back. Although many of the Brown boys whom I interviewed knew very little of North America and Europe’s colonial and racist past, they were acutely aware, in their varied ways, of how racism had affected them and, especially, the lives of their families. Although they may have known very little of how “bodies—skin, facial features, height, build, and so forth—have been morally and politically signified for centuries in North America and Europe” (Bannerji, 2000; p. 546), they were, in their varied ways, very aware that their bodies were sites that represented many different meanings. Although they may have known very little of how “their skin [was] written upon with colonial discourse—which [was] orientalist and racist” (Bannerji cited in Jiwani, 2006; p. 13), they were acutely aware, in their varied ways, that they now had an opportunity to re-write on their skin a different discourse. Nav, in an interview with me, shares his perspective:

Anish: You’ve used the word racism a few times; could you please tell me what you mean by this word?

Nav: Because of the way we have been treated in the past and when people question us “why are you are so bad as a race?”—not specifically but just generalizing—and

if you think about it how we were treated and how we act are very similar; we've had many examples of how you guys [referring to me], our parents who were younger and you guys [looks at me] were bullied and excluded and suffered racism because of being Brown or having an accent or dressing in a certain way. If you think about it, now that we are not so much of a minority, there isn't that much more of racism happening anymore, at least here in Rowling. But, also, we make sure that it doesn't happen anymore and now we sort of act the opposite way and we are viewed as the ones who bully others.

Anish: Wow, this is very powerful, Nav ... Can I ask you a few questions so that I understand what you just said better?

Nav: [Nods]

Anish: You said something like: "how we—Brown people—were treated in the past and how you guys all act now are connected or similar." What do you mean by this? I hope I'm not putting words in your mouth—you did say something to this effect right?

Nav: Yeah. I mean, it's simple. All Brown people were damaged for a long time and it wasn't fair how we all were treated, I mean like racism and beaten up and discriminated so now we are acting like that to make sure it doesn't happen [to us] anymore. And if it's going to happen then we will do it and [but] not let anyone do it to us.

Anish: You mean bullying?

Nav: Bullying and being tough and swearing and all that.

Anish: You said you don't think racism is happening anymore?

Nav: No, it definitely is; it's not like back in the day when you guys and my family were going through it. ... I think there is less now because there is more of us and we won't let anyone treat us that way again.

Anish: What do you mean?

Nav: We won't let history repeat itself. We are taking control; it's like we may not be the majority but we can take the power. Whose going to stop us? If we have the power then they can't do stuff to us. We will bully you [people who once had power] and not let them bully us like before or the way they probably want to even right now. ... It means also feeling good about yourselves or ourselves because it's like if you don't feel proud of your culture and your heritage and the face you put out there then why should they give you respect?

I asked Nav other clarifying questions that helped me better understand what he meant by “bad as a race” and “act the opposite way . . .,” which I will recount in Chapter 11, when I examine the theme of “Brown boy complicity.” For now, let me connect Nav’s comments to the current topic of skin color. Although in his exchange with me, Nav only explicitly referred to skin color once—“being Brown”—he alluded to the positioning or emblem of “Brown” several times. Among other things, being Brown to Nav meant an opportunity to seize the power away from those who in the past had oppressed and subjugated Brown people. Brown skin became a palimpsest for this new generation of Brown boys at Montclair High School to re-write on their skin a new discourse of power. Nav, represented the general sentiment of the other Brown boys I interviewed, when he emphatically declared that “we won’t let history repeat itself.” The thought of racism that their parents and other family members had experienced invoked in these students a myriad of feelings; two that I was able to confirm through discussion with Nav and others were anguish and stony resolve. The other side of anguish—they felt at the thought of the debasement and degradation their parents had experienced—was stony resolve that this type of symbolic, emotional, or physical violence would never happen to them or their family members again. Whatever power their parents’ oppressors had—which many of the students unsophisticatedly categorized as brute strength or might—they would seize and wield against anyone who even intimated that they were inferior or subservient. That is, there was an unspoken understanding amongst these students that if there were going to be any episodes of intimidation or bullying, in the words of Nav, “we will bully you and not let them bully us like before or the way they probably want to even right now.” In their minds, they now had the reins of power and

would dictate the agenda of fear and intimidation. In the next two chapters, I will expand on this analysis.

Nav also revealed another sentiment prevalent in the discourse of power written on these students' Brown skin. "It means also feeling good about yourselves or ourselves because it's like if you don't feel proud of your culture and your heritage and the face you put out there then why should they give you respect"? This reference to self respect and healthy collective community self-image appeared several times in my interviews with these students; however, unfortunately I was not savvy enough during my time in the research field, to identify in these comments a recurring theme and hence explore with them the possible insights that lay latent in their comments. It was only during my analysis of the research texts that I realized the significance and possible wisdom of these comments. This loose narrative thread, along with others I will identify in subsequent chapters, are worthy of further investigation in a follow-up to this study.

Even though a large group of disaffected South Asian male students identified themselves as Brown boys, the epithet of Brown boy itself may have had an ignominious past. Interestingly, according to three senior teachers at the school, the violent gangster male students, who attended Montclair High School several years ago, were referred to by the teachers as "Brown boys." It was, according to Amrit, one of the three teachers, a patronizing identity. Amrit explains:

I don't see it [Brown boys] as a neutral term; I view that it could be me too. I hear so much negativity about this group of boys, which began several years back when we experienced some of our students being murdered. It is still hard to believe. I have heard themselves call each other Brown crew, PWO, or 3D but Brown boys is definitely *not* [emphasizes] coming from them. That is a term that is used on them.

Something, however, changed over the years. During the next few years, since the schools' dark past—when murder, crime, and violence, were linked to some of the Brown boys who attended Montclair High School—the power and ownership of the term “Brown boy” shifted hands. These male students now began calling themselves the Brown boys. They took control of the “Brown boy” identity construct. Once again, Amrit shares her thoughts: “Now I don’t think they [Brown boys] should be referring themselves as Brown boys—which they do. It is, I think, connected with the whole US thing, with the ‘nigger’ word. I think it is called re-appropriating, right?” Amrit is referring to the process of what Hall (1997a) calls “trans-coding: taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings” (p. 270). Amrit claims that the group of disaffected South Asian male students at Montclair High School, who were derogatorily referred to as the “Brown boys” a few years ago, have now re-appropriated this epithet. Somehow over the years, they have reworked or re-inhabited the term so that it occupies a subject-position of their own liking. Hall (1997a) asserts that since the 1960’s, there have been many different types of trans-coding strategies to redress the issues of power and representation central to identity politics. He examines three in particular: *Reversing the stereotypes*—devising counter-strategies of reversing the evaluation of popular stereotypes; *positive and negative images*—substituting a range of positive images for the negative imagery that dominates the representation of the minoritized; and *through the eye of representation*—contesting the form of representation from within its own signifying practices (p. 270-276). In the case of the Brown boys at Montclair High School, I do not think the de-coding strategies they used were deliberate or methodical as Hall describes above; however, a further study examining their explicit

and/or implicit processes could prove me wrong. From the interpretation of my field texts, this group of South Asian males emptied, for themselves, the epithet “Brown boy” of meanings that may have been negative and re-signified or re-populated it with meanings such as, “friend,” “brother,” “homie,” or “dude.” Somehow, over the course of a few years, the relationship between the signifier and signified—Brown boy and “fill-in-negative-connotation”—was sundered and supplanted instead by another chain of signified, as determined by the Brown boys. For this group of South Asian male students, the epithet “Brown boy”—and “Brown crew,” which they used synonymously—became their own and the meanings attached to this designation were also determined and governed by them.

The new meanings attached, however, were not all positive. Borrowing from the pervasive influence of hip hop¹⁹ culture, which the majority of the Brown boys so wholeheartedly subscribe to, many of the new meanings included negative terms and images such as “G or gangster,” “player,” “pimp,” “hood” and “outlaw.” In this way, not only did they empty, for themselves, the epithet “Brown boy” of its old negative associations but paradoxically, they ruptured the old power differential so that now they felt they controlled the reins of power. By re-signifying “Brown boy” with new negative associations that evoked images and perceptions of threat, aggression, and intimidation, the Brown boys explicitly shifted the balance of power so that they felt in charge. That is, by populating the term “Brown boy” with meanings that elicited emotions of fear,

¹⁹ “Hip hop is a cultural movement which developed in New York City in the early 1970s primarily among African Americans and Latin Americans. Hip hop's four main elements are MCing (often called rapping), DJing, graffiti writing, and breakdancing . Other elements include beatboxing, hip hop fashion, and slang.” Additionally, “gangsta rap is one aspect of hip hop culture. The “gangsta” identity both represents the drama of the streets, but also the “merchandizing of the rhymes of violence” by profit hungry media companies” (Hip Hop, 2008)

unease, and even foreboding, the Brown boys remapped the coordinates of power so that now, instead of the teachers, they controlled the psychological and emotional evocations of the epithet. They positioned the identity term “Brown boy” in a way that when it was uttered, it conjured up apprehensions of dread, anxiety, and threat.

Wannabe and Hardcore Brown boys

Three months deep into the inquiry, an extremely unnerving, yet revealing incident occurred. During a formal interview with Nardev, a Brown boy, I noticed two other Brown boys sit down at a table in an open hallway nook adjacent to our room. Nardev and I were in a fishbowl: A see-through glass enclosed room used as a small teacher preparatory space. Without making it obvious, the two Brown boys had come to eye Nardev. Until then, the interview with Nardev was uneventful. He lifelessly went through the motions of responding to my questions. His replies were ready-made and trite. He seemed diffident but showed me cavaliness. At six foot two, his slouch spilled all over the chair. Clearly, his mind was elsewhere.

What seemed like coincidence but was probably borne of some form of heightened vigilance I was unaware of, Nardev caught the arrival of the two Brown boys from the corner of his eye. He put his hands in his pockets, feeling the column of his thighs for security. I pretended not to notice. His arrogance receded. There was now a needle in his voice. I asked him a question straight from my interview protocol: “What makes English your worst course (he had revealed this fact earlier in the interview)? Share with me some images, incidents, memories that come to mind when you think of this course.” A latch broke free. Skittishly, a torrent of words ensued.

Nardev: Some teachers are really nice to us; they understand that high school isn't the easiest time ever but some teachers, like my English teacher, looks at me the

wrong way all the time. They think you are up to no good. You might be having the worse day ever—like you are coming from work and your body is really sore and then you have all this school stuff on your mind and assignments to finish and then you walk into school and someone like the principal will say, ‘hey, you’re late!’ It just puts you down.

Anish: Because the teachers don’t know what you had to go through to simply come to school?

Nardev: Yes, just to come. Exactly. Like one time, after work, I tried to finish my social studies project. I fell asleep because I was so tired and it was 2 in the morning. But I woke up early and finished it before my class began. My teacher took a look at it [assignment] and threw it back on my desk. He said that it had to be typed, not handwritten. “Hey, man, do you know what it took for me to finish the assignment” [He inflected his voice as though he was speaking to his teacher]. You know how much your body hurts after work and when you have to get up early like that?

Anish: Your social studies teacher didn’t understand what it took for you to finish the assignment?

Nardev: Like, I wouldn’t work if I didn’t have to. It’s like my family situation depends on me working and that kinda puts you down when someone says something like: ‘I can’t believe you are late’; or ‘It needs to be done on computer!’ Come on man. Like you know what I had to do to come here. Little stuff like that just ticks you off, you know?

Anish: Did you try to explain this to your teacher?

Nardev: [Ignores my question] It’s like I have to work cos I feel kind of obligated cos my father’s work is seasonal. When his work slows down a lot, I feel I have to work. Then, last year, he got sick so I had to take over his role and supply rides to my sister and brother at [to] school and sports and stuff. Then after all this, I have to go to work after. I pay for my own food, bills, gas and then I give my mom money whenever she needs or wants it.

Just as I was about to respond to Nardev, I espied him snatch a quick glance of the Brown boys outside in the hallway nook. The next split second unfolded in slow motion. I, too, instinctively glanced in the boys’ direction and caught the tail end of an action that helped me to further understand and better position the identities of the group I referred to collectively as the Brown boys.

Using his middle finger, one of the two Brown boys, choreographed, in cold disdain, the gesture of a throat being slit. His teeth blazoned torment. Both boys' darted a look from Nardev to me and back to Nardev. In one fluid motion, they pushed the table forward and simultaneously stood up. Without looking back once, they disappeared behind the rib of grey lockers.

Unnerved, Nardev lowered his glance to the floor. He knew I witnessed the entire event. "What the hell just happened?" I *didn't* say those words. Instead, I swallowed them whole. I waited for Nardev to say something. He didn't. Do I acknowledge Nardev's obligation to work a graveyard shift to support his family or do I talk about the grenade that detonated in front of us?

"You were talking to me about something very personal, Nardev—your allegiance to your family and how the school doesn't get this. Then, we both saw something that I don't quite understand. Which should we talk about first?" I wish I had been quick enough to say this; instead, I stammered: "Where do you work?" Without missing a beat, Nardev blurted out: "airport baggage." He seemed relieved.

Anish: No wonder you are exhausted when you get home. It's a miracle you find any time to finish your homework.

Nardev: I just do what's important. Enough to get me through.

I could not hold it anymore.

Anish: Do you know those guys? [I looked at the recently vacated table. One of the chairs was on its side.]

Nardev: Yup.

Anish: What was that gesture?

Nardev: It's nothing. [Short pause] I gotta go.

Anish: Why?

Nardev: I just gotta go.

Anish: Nardev, are you in trouble? Do you need help?

Nardev: [laughs]. No. It's not what you think.

Anish: What am I thinking?

Nardev: Nothing man; it's nothing. [Avoids any eye contact]

Anish: You know I have to report what I saw to the principal? I don't want anything bad to come of what I just saw.

Nardev: [Looks up at me] Ok.

Anish: Are you sure you're ok?

Nardev: Yeah, man. [Open's door and walks out].

I reported the incident to the administration. I do not know if there was any follow-up or if anything came of this incident. I did, however, follow up with Nardev. After three requests for another interview, he reluctantly agreed to meet with me one day after school. The following short narrative represents my conversation with Nardev.

Let's just say that I had to take care of some business that I didn't want to. It's complicated but one of my crew's brother's iPhone was jacked and he thought it was my brother who did it. My brother swears it wasn't him. He said it was one of Manny's wannabe crew who did it.

To make it simple, we're called 3D's²⁰; we're part of PW0²¹. Montclair is our turf. Manny's crew wants a piece of it. So does Sukh's crew. But they're just wannabes. My crew's hardcore. They're wannabes clawing and scratching for a sniff of our air.

Sukh's crew are n00bs²²; Manny's crew's a bit tougher; they try to show stuff on You tube but anyone who tries to "show" anything are wannabes. We're the real G's²³: Manny and Sukh's crews will always be pwned²⁴ by us—the 3D's!

²⁰ Pseudonym for the real number-letter acronym of street names. Disclosure of the real acronym would provide sufficient information to breach confidentiality of the school, school district, and suburb. Montclair High School is located at the corner where two streets, 3rd Ave. and Davie St., intersect. Hence, 3D represents: 3rd Ave. and Davie St.

²¹ Punjabi World Order (not a pseudonym)

Nardev further stratified the identities of the South Asian boys at Montclair High School. Aside from the South Asian male categories of FOB's, Smart Brown guys, and Quiet Brown guys, which I examined in Chapter 5, Nardev hierarchizes the Brown boys into the categories of wannabes and the hardcore. According to Nardev—and confirmed by subsequent inquiry, which I will elaborate on below—his group of Brown boys was called 3D. He claimed that 3D was part of a larger group known as the Punjabi World Order (PWO), information which I was not able to confirm. 3D group members considered themselves as the “hardcore” group of Brown boys who “controlled” the “turf” at Montclair High School. According to Nardev, two other subordinate groups also coexisted at Montclair High School. He referred to them as “wannabes”: Brown boys who wanted to become “hardcore.” Despite further field research, I was not able to confirm whether these “wannabes” wanted to become part of 3D or whether they wanted to “overthrow” 3D and become the “ruling” group at Montclair High School. In fact, even by the end of the inquiry, I was unable to confirm whether or not Nardev’s portrayal of these three groups of boys was accurate. That is, although I was able to confirm that Nardev’s group of Brown boys, led by Ram, was called 3D, I was not able to confirm whether or not they were considered by others to be the “hardcore” or dominant group of Brown boys at Montclair High School. Despite three formal attempts to contact Manny for an interview, he chose to ignore each one of my requests. Additionally, I was

²² A person who is new to a game; A person who, regardless of experience, lacks the skill or competence to be competitive in a certain game

²³ Commonly used for companion, friend. Short for gangster.

²⁴ A corruption of the word "Owned." This originated in an online game called Warcraft, where a map designer misspelled "owned." When the computer beat a player, it was supposed to say, so-and-so "has been owned." Instead, it said, so-and-so "has been pwned." It basically means "to own" or to be dominated by an opponent or situation, especially by some god-like or computer-like force (pwned, n.d.)

unsuccessful at interviewing any of Manny's four "close" crew members whose identities were revealed to me by one of Sukh's crew members.

I did, however, successfully interview Sukh and a couple of his crew members. They did confirm that Ram's crew, 3D, were hardcore and of the three crews at the school, the locus of power resided with 3D. Sukh positioned himself and his group members as "friends" or fellow "Gs" of 3D but not officially part of them. Although he did not make any derogatory comments toward Manny or his crew, Sukh did mention that they were not very close.

At Montclair there are the 3Ds. They're hardcore. ... We're cool with them. They have their territory, we have ours, and Manny's crew have [sic] theirs ... Me and Manny go back to elementary but we don't hang anymore ... I have heard teachers reference PWO. ... I haven't heard Brown people being called PWO anymore. Like I don't say that I am PWO, but others in the school will say that I am PWO. Like kids, not teachers, will say, if you mess with this guy like PWO will get you and stuff like that.

Sukh's comment above reveals an interesting twist about the reference to PWO. Unlike Nardev who mentioned that 3D was part of a larger group called PWO, Sukh claims that PWO is an outdated term. His crew does not refer to themselves as PWO. Other "kids"—non-Brown boys—who are not part of any Brown crew, will invoke the term to refer to the toughness of the Brown boys. That is, Sukh seemed to imply that PWO is a term used by non-Brown boys to describe the collective delinquency of the Brown boys and not necessarily the identities of individual groups such as 3D, Manny's crew, or Sukh's crew.

Before I continue, let me take stock of the precipitating events that have permitted me to explicitly hierarchize the Brown boys into the two categories of "wannabes" and "hardcore." Witnessing the "slitting of the throat" gesture made by one of the two Brown

boys sitting outside the room where I was interviewing Nardev was both a fortuitous and unnerving event. Unnerving, because the gesture signifies a violent act. And, in light of the violent history at Montclair High School, it triggered in my mind an endless chain of violent images that further influenced, rightly or wrongly, my perceptions of the school's violent past and, possibly, present circumstances. Fortuitous, because it further fractured the identity construct of "Brown boys" clearly illustrating that it is a fictive, unstable, and indeterminate register, possessing in its own orbit of signification, an endless deferral of meanings and categories. In other words, as Derrida's (2000) assemblage of *différance* connotes, nested within the construct of "Brown boys" is an infinite possibility of other identity constructs that, at one and the same time, demonstrates the utility and uselessness of the construct. More specifically for this inquiry, unpacking the "throat slitting" gesture with Nardev, informed me of two other identity categories—wannabe and hardcore—concealed within the essentialized identity construct of "Brown boys." Cognizant of these two terms, I began to engage other teachers, students, and educational leaders in formal and informal conversations with an aim to uncover more and deeper meanings attached to the terms. Of all the educators I spoke to only one teacher, Parker Coulter, the social studies teacher whose class I was assigned to observe and interview, had any information about the wannabes and hardcore Brown boys. Let me clarify: All the educators whom I spoke with understood the identity constructs of wannabes and hardcore boys and they were aware that there could be a possibility that some of the Brown boys in this school were affiliated with these types of lifestyles; however, they did not have any information that would corroborate or refute Nardev's assertions. Additionally, all but one teacher had heard the terms 3D and PWO. I thought John Bright, who loquaciously chronicled the

violent past of Montclair High School—as I recounted in Chapter 4—would have some knowledge of these groups; however, he was unavailable to share his thoughts in a second interview, despite [my] several persistent requests. In any case, Parker offers his perspective:

My perception, which I have heard from many of the Brown guys themselves, is that there is a hardcore group and a follower or wannabe group. The follower group tries to buy the bad boy image that sells them into the school; that is, that I am ‘the drug guy’, ‘the cool guy’, ‘we do this’, ‘we are intimidating’, ‘we are powerful’, ‘prankster’, ‘gangster’ or whatever it is. I know for a fact [emphasis], that most of these wannabe boys are not dealing drugs or doing drugs or involved in gangs or any of these kinds of things; they are like all attention-seeking wannabe boys. They are, pretty much, young and immature. They will sometimes latch on to that mystique or aura that the ‘hardcore’ group of Brown guys possess. It is the ‘hardcore’ group of guys that know the men from the boys; they are the ones who really know. Coming back to the hardcore group, I think, we have always had them at this school. I mean we have always had them and, like I have already told you, a few years back, many of those hardcore kids are now dead. They are dead. [Shakes head in disgust] They were committing the most violent and serious crimes. They were serious criminals, not the silly wannabe boys who get their kicks by pulling fire alarms or bullying a poor unsuspecting sod.

Parker offers an uncomplicated, black and white description of the wannabes and hardcore Brown boys. From his explanation, he would agree with the *Oxford* dictionary definition of wannabe—a person who tries to be like someone else or to fit in with a particular group of people. According to Parker, the wannabe Brown boys want to emulate or fit in with the hardcore Brown boys, whom he believes are the “the serious criminals.” The wannabe Brown boys, he explains, are “young and immature” and are bewitched by the allure of the perceived glamorous mobster lifestyle of the hardcore Brown boys. He claims that Montclair High School has “always had them [the hardcore Brown boys]” and implies that the school probably still has some element of this group in attendance. He recounts the school’s “murderous past” to emphasize the hardcore Brown

boys' actual or realized danger not just a hypothetical or imagined threat associated with the boys' lore.

I shared with Parker, Nardev's account²⁵ of Manny and Sukh's wannabe groups "clawing and scratching for a sniff of our [the hardcore Brown boys'] air" with the hope of triggering a memory or facilitating a link between events he might have filed away in his mind as disparate; however, he admitted that this information "is news to me but very believable, if not probable."

Incidentally, in private conversations, I recounted Nardev's revelations and musings with all the educational leaders of the school. All four of them were cognizant of the "concepts" of wannabe and hardcore groups and had also heard of the acronyms 3D and PWO. Mary, the vice-principal and Jack, the principal, however, admitted that they were not aware of the "organized" nature of these groups in their school. From their experiences, the Brown boys were all naïve wannabes exploring and testing—albeit maddeningly for the school—the different dimensions of the "bad boy" image. Interestingly, Kirk listened intently to my retelling of Nardev's thoughts and repeated, more or less, what I had just shared with him. He found it hard to admit that he was not aware of information about the school—credible or otherwise—that I had uncovered in my research. Self-appointed as the barometer of the views of Montclair school, Kirk appropriated my recount of Nardev's musings and by the end of our conversation he was conveying to me renderings I had just shared with him as though it was for me fresh insight. Ridley, who made an appearance above and who will develop in full color in the next chapter, discounted what I shared with him. He said that my source "has an active

²⁵ When recounting Nardev's account with others, for reasons of confidentiality, I did not mention his name.

imagination” and “probably wants it to be true.” “Many of our South East Asian kids would like to think they are in gangs. It’s more of a sense, I would say, of self-importance than reality or fact in this school.”

To sum up, the focus of my inquiry was not to determine the power relationships and hierarchical standings of the Brown boys. Discovery of a hardcore group and wannabe groups was a fortuitous occurrence, which allowed me to further differentiate the school experiences of South Asian boys at Montclair High School. If the aims and methods of my study were different and the sites of my observation and interviews varied from the restrictions of the four walls of the school, I might have encountered a different set of experiences and meanings that could have yielded different and perhaps more insightful information about the varying power relationships between these Brown boys. In any case, I did attempt to uncover more information about group dynamics amongst the Brown boys within the parameters of the study but with limited success. For the purposes of categorizing and thus examining the different experiences of the Brown boys at Montclair High School, I make the following assumptions based on the field information I was reliably able to collect. I must underline, however, that there may be even further identity distinctions and nuances among the groups of Brown boys that I was unable to identify or decipher. First, there were three groups of Brown boys; one of the three, called 3D and led by Ram, was considered the dominant or hardcore group of Brown boys. Second, the other two groups, led by Manny and Sukh respectively, were the wannabe groups, who for whatever reason wanted to possess, share, or usurp the social power and status currently enjoyed by 3D. Third, PWO was a term used by both South Asian and non-South Asian students and teacher at Montclair High School to

collectively represent the recalcitrant, delinquent, and mobster-like behaviours of all the Brown boys.

I must make explicit the ambivalence I feel about using the term Brown boy. Even though it is an epithet used by the Brown boys themselves and perhaps even reflects an attempt by these disaffected South Asian students to re-appropriate this term, I remain uncertain whether or not I am, unwittingly or irresponsibly, continuing to write on their/our skin with a colonial discourse that is both Orientalist and racist (Bannerji, cited in Jiwani, 2006). In the end, my decision to employ this epithet in my dissertation rests on the assertion the language used by minoritized groups to manufacture or convey their own political agency must be treated earnestly and sincerely (Bannerji, 2000). An identity construct such as Brown boy that grows out of the students' own contexts, even if the term has a specious origin, must be treated, as Bannerji, (2000) states, "as a bit of ideology" (p. 546). In this way, not only does the epithet of Brown boy disclose a particular direction of these students' political agency, but it reveals how well they are functioning in a social field of hierarchical power relations that influences the nature and quality of their lived experiences. Hence, when I use, in this study, the epithet of Brown boy, my intention is very much to acknowledge the students' political agency and to convey to my readers a sense of their lived experiences using the identity construct of their own choosing.

7. CRIMINALIZATION OF THE BROWN BOYS ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS, AND ACTIONS

Whenever something bad happens in our school, like a smoke bomb or something, the first thing they do is to grab 4 Brown kids ... They just corner the Brown people. No Chinese. No Whites. Just Brown people. That's not fair. The majority of the time it will be the Filipino guys that will be involved. They do more bad things than us. But they will blame us. Everyone knows that we will always get blamed. That's the way it is around here. (Kas)

No matter how I parsed the research field notes, coded and re-coded themes, and constructed and re-constructed observations and interview notes, I heard, read, and re-read in all of them a common refrain: There is something wrong with these boys; they are just not right. The something "wrong" or "not right" was language by the participants in this study, in multiple ways; among the descriptors used were: "violent," "indolent," "dumb," "weak readers," "gangsters," "druggies," "there-is-drama-whenever-they-go," "power hungry," and "deeply and inherently spoilt." The sentiment behind these and other descriptors was that the deviance associated with the behaviours of these boys was located in themselves, their culture, religion, or their lifestyles. All these misbehaviours, transgressions, and imprudence were a result of who they are and from where they come. In other words, the lives of the Brown boys or Brown crew at Montclair High School were repeatedly pathologized.

Before I examine the concept of pathologizing practices, let me explain why I did not review the literature for it when I located this study in Chapter 2. I entered the study open and willing to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian males. Although many possible explanations and accompanying theories for these explanations entered my mind, I suspended my theorizing. I did not want to prematurely

identify or consider possible reasons, explanations, or theories that would influence my reading of the students' experience, how they were positioned, and how they positioned themselves. Toward the end of the study and particularly during the long period I had dedicated for data analysis—when it became abundantly clear to me that the lives of the Brown boys at Montclair High School were repeatedly pathologized—I re-visited the literature of pathologizing and deficit theorizing. As I began writing the dissertation, I had, of course, the option to include this literature in Chapter 2, with the other theoretical frameworks of identity construction, multiculturalism, and transformative educational leadership. After careful deliberation, however, I choose not do so; instead I placed the literature in this chapter—a point in my dissertation where I am sharing with my readers the research data and accompanying analysis. The positioning of this literature here and now is my symbolic statement that the themes of pathologizing and deficit theorizing of the South Asian students emerged toward the end of the research inquiry. When in the research field, I did not consciously or purposely read the data through the theoretical lens of pathologizing literature.

Pathology, a common term in medicine, refers to viewing or characterizing something as deviant or abnormal. In the educational context, it is used metaphorically to describe the process and impact of dominant groups who inferiorize the lives of subordinate groups (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). That is, the hegemonic apparatuses of the dominant groups ascribe deficiency to difference and re-code diversity as deviance; in this way, any aspect of life, outside the norms as defined by the dominant group, is marked abnormal or aberrant. Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi (2005) assert that pathologizing the lived experiences of people has deep colonial and imperial roots. They

and others (Deyhle, 1992; Valencia, 1997) argue, the *raison d'être* of the colonial discourse is to represent the cultural, social, ethnic, and intellectual dimensions of Indigenous people as a pathologized Other.

Pathologizing occurs in many forms; one form is commonly referred to as deficit thinking. According to Valencia (1997), deficit thinking is “tantamount to the process of ‘blaming the victim’. It is a model founded on imputation, not documentation” (p. x). In schools, this deficit thinking discourse “blames the minoritized student” for all the travails of the educational system. Failure is a result of the student’s “limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behaviour” (p. 2). Any type of difference in the lives of a minoritized student is positioned as deficit.

Shields et al., (2005) elaborate:

Pathologizing the lived experiences of children becomes a process of treating differences (for example, achievement levels, abilities, ethnic origin, and knowledge perspectives) as deficits that locate the responsibility in the lived experiences of children (home life, socioeconomic status) rather than locating responsibility within classroom interactions and relationships, or indeed, within the education system itself (p. xx)

According to Valencia (1997), Shields et al., (2005), Skrla & Scheurich (2001) and others, deficit thinking, like systemic racism, is so deeply entrenched in educational theory and practice that many schools who serve the needs of minoritized students perpetuate this mindset unawaresly. Pathologizing the lived experiences of minoritized students has become the *habitus* of these schools; it is so deeply implanted in the structures, policies, practices, and organization of the school that the pathologizing worldview becomes the common-sense or default way of thinking in the school. Shields

et al., (2005) capture in their definition of pathologizing this notion of *habitus* brilliantly.

It is their robust concept of pathologizing that I use throughout this dissertation:

a process where perceived structural-functional, cultural, or epistemological deviation from an assumed normal state is ascribed to another group as a product of power relationships, whereby the less powerful group is deemed to be abnormal in some way. Pathologizing is a mode of colonization used to govern, regulate, manage, marginalize, or minoritize, primarily through hegemonic discourses (p. x).

According to my organization, interpretation, and analysis of the data, I propose that the Brown boys at Montclair High School are pathologized in two dominant ways: criminalizing and deficit thinking. In this chapter, I examine, systematically, how the Brown boys are pathologized by the criminalization of their attitudes, behaviours, and actions. First, I examine how the Brown boys' propensity of assembling in large groups is viewed not only as inherently deviant but a predilection toward violent and criminal behaviours. Second, I explore the accusations of intimidation levelled at the Brown boys. Third, I examine how certain clothes worn by the Brown boys contribute to their criminalized perception. Lastly, I explore how the Brown boys are positioned as "gang" members in an effort to illustrate how their identities are criminalized. In Chapter 9, I examine the influences of deficit thinking: The second dominant way that the Brown boys are pathologized.

Large Groups

When referring to or talking specifically about the Brown boys, every single non-South Asian student and non-South Asian teacher stated that these male students hang²⁶ in numbers that far exceed what is or should be considered appropriate or "normal."

²⁶ Students constantly corrected or reminded me—most of them chortling respectfully—that the term was "hang in groups" or "hang together" not "hang around in groups" or "hang around together." The inclusion of "around" after "hang" was treated as a serious faux pas that warranted correction every time I inappropriately used that expression.

When pressed to explain what is considered appropriate or normal, Lisa, a female White teacher captured the sentiments of most of the non-South Asian teachers and students interviewed:

Why do they [Brown boys] have to travel together in packs? Like wolves. They cluster in large numbers and as a result people fear a clear path. Don't some or all within the South Asian community think that is a bad thing or [stutters] perhaps it is a cultural thing or a form of protection for them.

<p>The tone of puzzling incredulity underlying Lisa's comment was evident in many of the other interviewees as well. Lisa and others were both confounded and angry at not only the Brown boys' desire to congregate in large groups, but why they were free to do so. In other words, why do these Brown boys have this need to convoke in large groups? And why are we, as a school, letting them? Why do they "travel together in packs? Like wolves." For Lisa, this is not "normal" human behaviour; it is what animals, like wolves, do. Civilized human beings, according to her, do not "cluster in large numbers" and evoke fear in others. Plainly, Lisa is insinuating that these boys are different; they are not like other</p>	<p>As I examined in Chapter 3, the degree of power, bias, and influence that an interviewer possesses is astonishing. Here is another example of an interviewer influencing not only the shape of the interview but the degree of honesty and candidness of the interviewee. Interestingly, in the middle of her sentence, Lisa realizes that she may be carelessly entering into a discourse of blame and discrimination so she quickly and adeptly steers the conversation elsewhere. She swiftly submits a terse explanation of the Brown boys' behaviour that is grounded in the boys' culture. "Don't some or all within the South Asian community think that is a bad thing or ... perhaps it is a cultural thing or a form of protection for them." This diversion provides</p>
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boys in the school. They are somehow deviant.

Other teachers, too, questioned the need for the Brown boys to assemble in large groups. Their comments, however, focused more on the inconvenience and groupthink mentality that sometimes occur when large groups assemble. Even though they focused on the travails of space management or crowd control that usually result when large groups congregate, the language they used to describe the situations, and more so the Brown boys' behaviour, employed tropes of abnormality, strangeness, and primitivity. Although their comments were generally free of animal or insect comparisons (except for one teacher who compared the Brown boys to "a school of fish," which I will cite below and another teacher who described the act of assembling in large groups as "swarming") and explicit put-downs, how they chose to frame their concerns and comments, position their

her with a defensible detour should she need one. Let me explain.

As Lisa shares her thoughts about the Brown boys and compares them to a pack of wolves, she stares intently to my left—not at anything visible in the room but at a collection of experiences or memories that she has conjured up in her mind's eye. She is lost in the re-construction of the experience that she is sharing with me. As she speaks quickly and freely, the width of her forehead creases ever so tightly. She wants to break through whatever barrier it is that prevents her from understanding why the Brown boys' behave this way. She muses: "Don't some or all within the South Asian community think that is a bad thing or [begins to stutter] ..." That moment of intense search for meaning—a penetration into something foreign—however, is unceremoniously paralyzed by a flash of realization that she may be entering into an arena that isn't safe. She aborts her thought. She glances at me to assess where she needs

statements, and communicate non-verbally confirmed that the problems originated from the identities of the Brown boys. Before I examine some of their narratives, let me re-situate and, then, introduce an accompanying theoretical construct that both undergirds and develops this argument.

As I examined in Chapter 2, difference, in the modernist paradigm—which still dominates and shapes much of our educational landscape and discourse—has predominately been framed in the either/or realm of binary logic. Hall (1997b) and others (Du Gay et al., 2000; Rutherford, 1990; Woodward, 1997) claim that the two terms in the binary are differentially weighted so that one term of the dichotomy is more legitimate or valid than the other. Hence, one of the two terms in the binary is positioned as the “norm” while the other, opposing term, is positioned as “abnormal.” Combine the White discursive practices of exnomination, naturalization, and

to go in order to finish her sentence. She makes a judicious decision: “...perhaps it is a cultural thing.” She resorts to an explanation of the boys’ culture. It is the safe thing to do. She continues: “... or a form of protection for them.” She covers herself even more by quickly referencing that perhaps the boys are seeking protection from “something” that we do not realize, hence the need to roam in clusters. Lisa does not say anymore. The honesty of our conversation lies on the balance. She searches my eyes. She searches to see how safe she is in this conversation.

At this moment, I know that what I say will determine or shape the rest of the conversation. Equally, I know that my body and facial reaction will calibrate the degree of safety she feels toward me. A hint of judgment in my look or words will knock the conversation in a different trajectory altogether.

I have been in this moment far too many times in my life. Far too many times in my life has someone begun to share with me

universalization (Gabriel, 1998; Jiwani, 2006), which I examined in Chapter 2, with the effects of this binary logic and what results is the containment, trivialization, exoticization, criminalization, disavowal, and negation of any kind of difference (Jiwani, 2006). The point I want to underline here is that in addition to these discursive stratagems there are others used by the culture of power (Delpit, 1995; Hage, 2000) to naturalize the inferiority of the Other and the superiority of itself. Of interest in this inquiry is the stratagem of “selectivity,” which lies in its ability to control the construction of narrative. Hall (1983), explains:

It’s another ideological position which allows you to see what the particular structure of one narrative is, and essentially what are its limits. Now I think that that process really begins by always identifying what I would call the silences in a particular narrative form. It is not what an ideology says, which is what we usually think; it’s in the things that ideology always takes for granted, and the things it can’t say—the things it systematically

thoughts that I have found offensive or even abhorrent. Too often the conversations will include the topic of my religion, skin color, or culture; my conversationalist, however, will talk about any one of these as though I was invisible, detached, or indifferent from the topic. Far too many times I have suspended the pall of my own judgment and made others feel comfortable to continue sharing their thoughts. I have always wondered: Is it that I am dysfunctional and have learned to blot out my own feelings or is that I have learned to genuinely separate myself from my own emotions and thoughts so that I can enter completely, indifferently, and empathically into the experience of the other? Is it that I have learned to control the fine muscles in my face so well that I do not let an inadvertent twitch betray my non-judgmental countenance? Or is it my insatiable curiosity and desire to understand another—to enter into the world of the other, to hear his or her world view so fully, so entirely—that leads me to suspend my

blips out on. That represents exactly the point of its selectivity, and that's how (if you take another ideological position) you can see where the absences and silences are, and you can begin to interrogate the seamless web of that particular story from the viewpoint of another story, as it were. (p.4)

Control of the dominant narrative and how it is constructed and utilized to ensure that the current power imbalances and hierarchies remain undisturbed and uncontested has been widely and insightfully examined (some include: Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1979; Freire & Macedo, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1996; Leistyna & Sherblom, 1996) What I want to highlight from this discourse of language and power, in particular, is what Hall notes above: the “selectivity” of the dominant narrative, “the thing it systematically blips out.” It is in the “absences and silences” that are too often blipped out that the voices—cries and rationales alike—of the subjugated can be heard. Embedded in

sense of self—a vacation from my body and face—so that they do not betray my inner feelings and thoughts. I suppose it is all of these. I suppose it depends on the circumstances, context, who is speaking, and what we are speaking about that will determine to what extent I will feign non-judgment or be non-judgmental.

Whichever it was with Lisa, she assesses in that split moment, a safety in my glance. A trust in my stance. An acceptance and comfort of how she ended up, in her telling, at the words: "wolves," "packs," and "fear" when speaking about Brown boys. She does, however, give herself an exit, a way out. She drudges up "culture" and "victimization" as possible reasons for the Brown boys behaviour should she see, in me, a disapproval of how she is thinking and where she is taking the conversation. My look and reaction, however, seems to comfort her enough that she does not have to expand on the "culture" and "victimization" narrative if she does not want to.

every narrative are “areas of blindness” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1996; p.185). Behind the words that are spoken are the words that are unspoken. Sometimes these words are purposely muted; sometimes they are crowded out. Sometimes they are emptied of meaning and context; sometimes they are shamed into silence. Whatever the epistemic violence (Spivak, 2005), these unspoken words and narratives cling tight to the other side of the words and narratives that are heard.

In light of this and other discursive stratagems that I examined in Chapter 2, I now examine the narratives of other teachers in Montclair High School. As these teachers speak, I will attempt to both problematize and uncover any “areas of blindness” embedded in their narratives.

Ridley, an educational leader at Montclair High School, whom I introduced in the last chapter, shares his point of view in a lengthy passage that follows:

My non-judgmental stance comforts her to pause and assess where she should direct her telling. I see in her eyes that she needs for me to say something before making this decision. So I speak.

But before I speak, I nod. I nod in acceptance of her. I nod to affirm that wherever she wants to go in her telling, it will be safe. I then add: “These boys are big and when they stand around together they are imposing. Many interviewees have told me the same thing, that they are scary when they stand around in these large numbers. Tell me, why do you think they do? How have you made sense of it?”

I invite her to speak. I reassure her that it is safe to explore her thoughts with me. And she does. She, once again, begins sharing with me her thoughts and explanations. They are so brutally candid that, at times, I wince but do not show her.

Upon reading her transcript weeks after her interview, Lisa asked me to delete many of her responses. One passage she

Our South East Asian boys do stick together. And it is not unusual to see 20 to 25 South East Asian boys *plant* themselves somewhere and that is when they start to make bad decisions. All they want to do is have fun but then there is a group-thing that happens. Well, like, they will stand in the community center or hallways and there are about 25 of them standing and talking but they are blocking the hallway and some kids can't get through and some kids want to get through and now there is a *problem* and the boys will say, "what's your problem, we are just standing here talking". Well, "the problem is that you are blocking the whole hallway" [sarcastically]. Or they will stand in front of the exercise room and some lady is exercising in there and they are standing there looking and the *impression* is that they are standing and *leering*; but the boys couldn't care less about these 50 year old women doing their yoga exercises or pilates. The *impression*, however, is that they are trying to create a *problem* and then everyone gets defensive on all sides and they [Brown boys] feel like they are being watched and being treated differently from other kids. [As he says this next statement, he throws his hands up in the air and rolls his eyes] But the basic thing I want to say is "*go somewhere else; go stand around somewhere else and no one will have to talk to you.*" [Emphasis mine].

asked me to delete was her response to my above question. It may have been safe to share her thoughts with me at that moment—in that relationship of mutual trust—but when they appeared forged in words visible for either herself or all to see, she ceded. She wanted those thoughts, those words erased entirely. That moment in time, as far as we are concerned, did not happen. In fact, Lisa also wanted to erase the "wolves" quote that I have included and examined in detail above. I requested her to re-consider. I spoke to her about how she arrived at that statement on her own; how her choice of words such as "wolves," "pack," etc... represented her legitimate fears. I told her that if she wanted to delete everything she said in response to my clarifying question it would be fair. After all, I was the one who prodded her to share these thoughts that she now, in retrospect, feels reluctant to share. However, as much as I did not want her to rescind the "wolves" quote, I reassured her that it was ultimately her right

Ridley is rightfully worried about how the large groups of the Brown boys' impact the space management of the school. Their large groups often block hallways and prevent the flow of foot traffic in an already crowded school. This is particularly aggravating when a community center—which offers fitness classes to adults and elders—is attached to the school and adds to the congestion. He describes how these boys will “plant” themselves in a spot, oftentimes in front of the large visible window of the fitness room in the community center and give the “impression” that they are “leering” at the “50 years old” women who are exercising. Ridley is visibly frustrated as he shares with me that all this can easily be solved if the Brown boys “go stand somewhere else.” The words Ridley chooses are curious. Why is it that the “impression” that these Brown boys give to the others either in the school

and decision to censor her interview text to her liking and that whatever she decided, I would support her. After thinking about it, she felt that the inclusion of that quote maintained and accurately reflected the integrity of her thoughts and, more importantly, the entire interview.

Obviously for ethical reasons, I cannot address the parts of Lisa's interview that she chose to delete. I must admit, however, that her decision torments me, for what she divulged to me, which I cannot share, is disturbing representative of the unspoken feelings and sentiments of many of the teachers at Montclair High School. Her deleted text could be alient for this inquiry for it captures the words, sentiments, and thoughts that many of the interviewees believe but do not state publicly. These un-stated sentiments, however, are far too controversial and none of the interviewees would ever want to be connected to them. Despite my reassurances of confidentiality, I suppose there are some words—some prejudices or biases—that no one would like to

or community center is a negative one? Why not an “impression” of solidarity, federation, or community? Why is it that he uses the word “leering,” even though he clearly states that the boys aren’t “leering”? Where is the “somewhere else” that the boys should go stand? Is it outside the “heart” of the school’s social space? Should they stand in the periphery where they are not seen? Why does he use the word “plant” to describe the boys’ location in a particular place? Let’s listen to more of Ridley.

We had a meeting and it involved what we can do to support and give good direction to some of our South East Asian members and students of our community. I arrived a bit late but when I did there was [sic] about 40 chairs in a circle. It was quite *remarkable* to me that there were husbands and wives, uncles and aunts, cousins and second-cousins, and grandmas and grandpas there from the South East Asian community and one of the first things I saw was that all the women were over here and all the men were over here [gestures, raises his eyebrows, and smiles]. It was a horseshoe but it was women and men. The men had all congregated [looks at me, pauses and continues] ...

see attached to his/her own text. So, I have to remain quiet; share only what I am permitted and leave hidden so much that is pertinent and insightful to this study. Hence, the torment.

With the risk of being hyper-reflexive, I must protract this narrative methodological analysis slightly further. I have to make explicit that by writing about this experience — this angst — have I implicitly shared with you, my reader, something of what Lisa has said that you are not suppose to read? In other words, by even raising this torment that I feel, am I not sharing something that she does not want me to share? Perhaps by speaking about this silence —the deleted text—I have constructed an identity of Lisa far worse than what she would have constructed had she agreed to share this deleted text. I suppose by engaging in this self-reflexivity, I illustrate, yet again, how biased I am; and perhaps even more importantly, how I am engaged in a deeply moral act as I write. I must monitor closely that the traces of her deleted text—her thoughts,

and that was *quite natural for them*. That was, I suppose, *comfortable for them*. Now, does that happen with Caucasians? [Begins to shake his head negatively but looks at me and then stops and says] “YYYe ... Yeah, may be.” But it was one of those things that really stood out to me and that it seems to be that they came in and immediately and socially divided

sentiments, and impressions—do not enter my analysis and writing. I must be particularly vigilant that what Lisa said, and then later withdrew, does not influence my representations of the other teachers and students in this inquiry.

into two groups. It was a social or cultural thing even though it was a school setting. And we see this in the school. The South East Asian girls don't hang out with the South East Asian boys. They won't mix and mingle but pass like ships in the night. There are times that they will talk to the boys but that is the exception; it is in their culture that you don't see the boys and girls together. You will see the Filipino boys and girls together and you will see the Japanese boys and girls together; you will see the Chinese boys and girls together and you will see the Caucasian kids with everyone—the Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino kids—but if you look down from the 2nd level, from what we call the rotunda, you won't see the boys and girls from the South East Asian coming together and chatting.

Ridley cites this experience of the evening meeting with the “South East Asian” community members of the school to explain to me why he thinks the South Asian male and female students at Montclair High School do not mix and why the Brown boys, in particular, keep to themselves. He begins by sharing how he found it “remarkable²⁷” to see such a wide array of extended family in attendance. In fact, he does not use the term “extended family” but instead proceeds to name the categories of relatives in attendance: “husbands and wives, uncles and aunts, cousins and second-cousins, and grandmas and grandpas.” Based on the context of the conversation and the manner in which he spoke, I inferred that he found it unusual to witness uncles, aunts, and second-cousins in attendance. Their presence was not a “normal” occurrence in his world view. Extended

²⁷ *Oxford Dictionary* defines “remarkable as “conspicuously unusual.”

families in the dominant culture do not “normally” involve themselves in school meetings that focus on issues of student improvement; these types of issues are treated with much more privacy and are addressed within the radius of the nuclear family. For Ridley, the degree of extended family involvement was unusual enough to explicitly address with me.

Moreover, Ridley states that seeing the women seated separately from the men in the school meeting “stood out” for him and that this seating arrangement was probably “culturally” based and “quite natural for them.” He reiterates that “even though” these individuals were all in a “school setting” or a secular environment they chose to let their cultural practices influence how they organized themselves, and thus, how they were perceived by others. The intrusion of culture into a “school setting” was problematic for Ridley. Students’ cultures, for him, definitely have their places in schools but only in spaces and at times that are sanctioned. School meetings, for Ridley, were not such a place. Later on in the

When sharing his comments above, on one occasion, Ridley dramatically changed what he was about to say because of my presence. Whether it was my “ethnicity” or the lack of safety, comfort, or security he felt, he consciously veered in a direction different from what he originally intended to say. The occasion was when he rhetorically asked whether or not gender separation “happen[s] with Caucasians?” He began to shake his head negatively as to suggest “of course not” but reassessed his conversational direction and motivation after glancing at me. He turned red. To close that thought quickly, which he seemed to regret raising, he simultaneously shrugged and stuttered: “YYYe ...Yeah, may be.” “Yeah, may be,” I interpreted as: “I don’t think so but since I don’t want to say anything more that I

interview, Ridley candidly shares his thoughts about the appropriate times and spaces for students to bring in “their culture.”

might regret, I will shut this thought down.”

We want these kids to show up in their garb and costumes and say, ‘can we put on a dancing display at lunch time or can we play our bhangra drums afterschool in the music room.’ They have so much of their culture to share and we have to find the right times for this to happen. I would like nothing better than that to happen. But it is happening less and less and I don’t know if it is becoming a less common activity in [Rowling]; they are just not involved in that kind of activity but would like to see more of it in school.

It is important to underline here that for Ridley, the culture of the “South East Asian” students— which took shape as “garb and costumes,” “dancing displays” and “bhangra drums”—was a welcome addition to the school only at specifically prescribed times and places. The cultural sharing—a form of pluralist multiculturalism—could happen in the “music room after school” or in a form of a “display during lunch time.” As artefact, entertainment, or amusement, cultural sharing of the minoritized is completely acceptable and even encouraged. However, when their cultural practices disrupt the dominant values that anchor mainstream society and intrude into the routinized practices and customs of the secular environment, they become a violation. For Ridley, then, observing “South East Asian” “uncles and aunts, grandpas and second-cousins” seated separately, according to gender, in a “school setting” was “remarkable.” Remarkably problematic.

To restate, the origin of this gender compartmentalization, according to Ridley, was undoubtedly cultural. For him, this gender segregation may be culturally inspired but a practice that he does not feel is warranted in a public institution such as a school. Male

and female students who do not “mix and mingle” and, instead, “pass like ships in the night” are not acting socially appropriately. This, for him was not normal. “Normal,” for Ridley, is the commingling of males and females in a social setting. In fact, he reveals what normalcy means to him when he lauds other minoritized male and female students for their cordiality and fraternity: “You will see the Filipino boys and girls together and you will see the Japanese boys and girls together; you will see the Chinese boys and girls together.” However, his loudest ovation is for the “Caucasian kids” as these boys and girls not only mingle with themselves, but they intermingle with males and females from *all* cultures: “... and you will see the Caucasian kids with everyone—the Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino kids.” The “Caucasian kids,” for Ridley, are accepting of everyone. They model normalcy in his worldview. Gabriel (1998), as I discussed in Chapter 2, would label this behaviour *normalization*. The “Caucasian kids” are the invisible reference point to which everyone else is or should be measured.

Below, Ridley and another educator, George, share more thoughts about the Brown boys assembling in large groups. Ridley adds:

... You will just see the boys together in a group but they will be *different, isolated* unto themselves. They are kind of *self-absorbed* but very *obvious* to everyone else. They *draw this line* between themselves and if you look down from the second level, you will see this cluster. Well, if you see the clusters, very rarely would you see a Caucasian, Japanese or Chinese child approaching and trying to become part of the South East Asian male group. Very rarely will you see that. With the girls, you will see them intermingling and mixing but with these boys, more so, these boys tend to *draw this line* and you will rarely see a non-South East Asian kid in that group, male or female. The *sense* is that they are not really *welcomed*. They aren't visibly pushing people away but they are not welcoming in the way that they would include others into their group and one of the key things to that is that they refer to themselves as the Brown boys. We are the Brown boys and you are not. [Emphasis mine].

George says:

When I first got here, I would be in my office, there would be so many boys congregated that we would hear a *hooting and chanting* all of a sudden. You always knew that something was up. The kids would all stay together tight-knit and if someone did something silly they would all respond together or if someone had a problem with one Brown boys, then they had a problem with *all* of the Brown boys ... They would all form a circle [shakes his head and snickers in amusement]. There was this *very visible way of standing together, arm-in-arm* [gestures as he sticks his hand out]; we are sticking together because it is us [Brown boys] and you; the Brown boys and everyone else. [Emphasis mine].

As with the previous narratives, similar themes run through the stories of these two teachers: *us* versus *them*; exclusivity amongst the Brown boys; and the Brown boys displaying peculiar behaviours. Let me begin with George; the spirit behind his comments is the peculiarity of the Brown boys' behaviours. It may not be explicit in George's words, however the way he described the Brown boys' actions and behaviours, it was obvious that he was amused. The students' actions of "hooting and chanting," "forming a circle," "arm-in-arm," for George, were unusual. These were practices that seemed unconventional or bizarre to him. His body language and facial features seem to reveal a mocking humour that he could hardly contain. Instead of describing these students' actions as different and worthy of learning or understanding; he framed his comments in a spirit of patronization.

Let me briefly comment on Ridley's repeated reference to "draw[ing] the line." Throughout the entire interview, Ridley positioned the Brown boys against the entire school. Words and metaphors that further entrenched the *us* vs. *them* binary pervaded his narrative. For Ridley, one of the major projects of school was to socialize all students to the normative values and ideologies of the dominant society (Osborne, 1999)

As a public educator for 31 years, we have different students from many different parts of the world and so, I believe that identity has several different components. Most importantly, I believe that all students have to

identify with the rest of the student body. They can come with their many identities but when at the school they have to *relate to Montclair High School and the students* who have been attending this school and other Rowley schools *for decades*. ... There are a lot of pressures on certain kids to behave a certain way depending on where they are from. There are times when students will get themselves in trouble in the school. *But our job* is to ensure that the students are *taught excellent citizenship skills*. With these common citizenship skills, we become strong citizens. *Canadian citizens*. One way they can only get these skills is to participate in school activities like teams and clubs. There are many students who behave in positive ways [in these teams and clubs] and these types of behaviours do *rub off* on others.

For Ridley the normative values and ideologies rest with the White “student body” “who have been attending this school and other Rowling schools for decades.” These normative values, which the dominant culture possesses, are what he calls “excellent citizenship skills.” The “job” of the school then, is “to ensure that the [minoritized] students are taught excellent citizenship skills” ... so that they “become strong citizens. Canadian citizens.” Uncontested in this socialization project called school, for Ridley, were the identities of the socialiser and socialized. Educators, more so White educators, as I have already examined, are the guardians of this “culture of power” who have the authority to make decisions. Minoritized students are the recipients, who hold minimal rights to contest rules and decisions as long as they do not fundamentally disrupt the dominant values. Teachers position; students are positioned. Teachers draw lines; students observe them expecting consequences if they are transgressed. For Brown boys to draw lines which challenge the authority of the dominant group in the school is unacceptable for Ridley. For Ridley to watch, daily, the Brown boys demarcate an exclusive social space where others—in particular, the dominant cultural groups—are excluded is deeply problematic. The displacement (and rupture) of power and identity

implied in the reversal of who is considered “us” and who is considered “them” is an underlying theme in this study.

Before returning once again to teacher leader Kirk, who bluntly shares his theory, perceptions, and disgust at the Brown boys’ need to form large groups, let me labour a little longer on Ridley’s perceptions and narratives of the Brown boys. We have read Ridley’s thoughts and feelings in the catharsis of the words he has spoken, the deliberate silence of the words he has not spoken, and the gesticulations and facial expression he has intimated. We have heard him culturalize and pathologize the Brown boys’ inclination to assemble in large groups and to organize by gender in social settings. He has maintained that the cultural traditions and values of others add richness to the life of a school and society as long as they do not disrupt the norms, values, and routines of the dominant culture. According to Ridley, having the power to select who is in and who is out of one’s social group, as the Brown boys do, is not socially just or morally responsible. Despite all these charges and claims, what is interesting is that both at the beginning and the end of the interview, Ridley vehemently denies that Montclair High School has any challenges with the Brown boys. He states consistently there are no problems. Below he shares his views in a conversation with me:

Ridley: I am not worried about the South East Asian kids. May be you [Anish] have the impression that our problem is the South East Asian population. They are not nearly as bad as *they think* they are. I tell them that: “You are not nearly as bad as you think you are!”

Anish: [Caught off guard] Let me clarify. I am investigating whether or not there is a problem and if there is, what is causing this problem. Many educators at your school district have stated explicitly that there is a problem with the South Asian population. Many teachers at your school and, in fact, all of the South Asian teachers at your school have stated explicitly there is a problem. [Realizing that I was getting defensive, I take a deep breath and begin talking less passionately] An unofficial study of your school paints a pretty grim picture of the academic

achievement of many of the South Asian boys for the past few years. Over the past 7 years, they have been almost invisible in the honour roll records and under-represented in the subject award nominations or winners. The majority of the Brown boys, themselves, have stated that they are experiencing a number of challenges in the school ...

Ridley: [Interrupting my clarification] I know what is going on in this school [condescendingly] and I know that there are kids from the South East Asian community who are involved in many things. I am looking at the ceiling now and thinking [looks at the ceiling]—Naa!—there are Caucasian kids, Chinese kids, there is [sic] Vietnamese and Spanish kids who are also involved in stuff. I am not worried about the South East Asian kids. Not at all. Not at all. Nope! [Mockingly] We deal with it. Just because they are visible and they tend to congregate is not a big deal.

You know, when you stand in a group of 20, 25 or so, basically it doesn't matter what color you are, or who you are—you are in the way! I will say, "C'mon guys, move on" and they will make a comment like: "How come you are not asking those guys" and I will say, "well, I know, but they aren't blocking the hallway." "Well," they say, "you should be talking to those guys first." This is a passive thing; you know, you have a bunch of really big, lunkheaded teenagers, and I mean that in a kind way, just standing around, just yucking it up, like everybody else has a right to do, but they are in the way, they are just so big! They are big boys! So, that is one problem but you know, that is nothing.

Griffin (1992) in her book *Chorus of Stones* claims: "I have come to believe that an as yet undiscovered human need and even a property of matter is the desire for revelation. The truth within us has a way of coming out despite all conscious efforts to conceal it" (p. 166). For Ridley, I was unsure which truth he wanted revealed. Was it that he did not think that the Brown boy had a problem, a statement which he repeated explicitly? Or was it that he did believe, subconsciously, that the Brown boys had a number of challenges: A belief that implicitly wove through every one of his stories and actions. Having "become part of the landscape of the school," where I was "there long enough to be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 77), I would surmise that

it was both. He was torn and the battle within him was often evident in the way his stated ideals contradicted his observable practice. He wanted to believe that he saw the Brown boys the way he saw every other boy in the school. Culture did not matter. Color did not matter. Ethnicity did not matter. According to Ridley, if a student had a problem it was the problem that needed correcting not the student. He tried desperately, as a longstanding educational leader, to implement a color-blind approach to student difference. What tortured Ridley, however, was that in the heat of a challenge or issue with the Brown boys, culture did matter. Color did matter. Ethnicity did matter. He could not help but see these students through the lenses of culture, skin color, and ethnicity. Critical theorists and post positive realist theorists would not only applaud Ridley for this discerning way of seeing, but would argue that for him and other educators to effectively teach and lead, they have to consider the epistemic value of social locations. As I discussed in Chapter 2, culture, skin color, ethnicity, gender, among other social categories, all work together to influence an individual's life experiences and hence the formation of his or her identity. The difference, however, between Ridley and what the critical theorists espouse is that Ridley cannot help but pathologize the social locations of the Brown boys. Instead of viewing them as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) that theoretically mediate the students' interpretation of experience and thus their world view, he sees them as vestiges of an inferior and deficit identity that must be shed for an alternative *habitus* that structures and organizes the world according to the norms and values of the dominant culture. In other words, he recognizes the Brown boys social locations, but for the wrong reasons. He inferiorizes and pathologizes their meaning-making systems insinuating that

for students to achieve success in school and to become productive citizens of society, they should follow the ways of the dominant culture.

Kirk, another teacher and educational leader at Montclair High School, bluntly shares his theory, perceptions, and disgust at the Brown boys' need to form large groups:

This school had a very strong rugby team and we were in the finals one year and these guys [Brown boys] came out but they didn't act like *normal* fans. Normal fans kind of spread out along the sidelines when they watch the game. These guys were like a *school of fish*. It was really *weird*. There were 10 or 12 of them but they stood in a group, not quite in a circle, but in a *bundle*, you know you can't even see the game like that but they didn't know how *to act*. Don't get me wrong, they didn't misbehave or anything; they were watching and cheering at appropriate times and they weren't swearing or anything which was good, coz, I am standing close to them, and I am not buying that. [Emphasis mine].

Kirk's narrative above—which I first recounted in Chapter 5—is perhaps the clearest indictment of deviancy attached to the Brown boys and, in particular their

Although Ridley's internal contradiction—as I have constructed it—is identifiable in the above text, it may not have been as discernable during his interview with me. One possible reason is narrative "smoothing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To attempt to make sense of Ridley's words, actions, stated intentions and the like, I have had to "smoothen," flatten, or round out the edges of some of his interview text. In other words, while being cognizant of the context of the conversation at all times, I have had to select some passages and anecdotes of Ridley's interview text—and not others—to reveal or better elucidate a theme or argument that I wanted to legitimize. Cobbling together one meditation from one part of the interview with another ostensibly related meditation from another part of the interview can be a delicate and precarious process. Some ideas and thoughts have to be stitched together while

inclination to assemble in groups. Not only was the number of Brown boys in the group—“10 or 12 of them”—an issue but how “they stood in the group” was not “normal.” They did not “spread out along the sidelines” like “normal fans” but “stood in a group, not quite in a circle, but in a bundle.” They did not follow the patterns of “normal” behaviour expected at a sporting event. They were more “like a school of fish,” another animalization reference. “They didn’t act like *normal* fans.” In other words, they did not act like normal, White, middle class, heterosexual boys. Once again, the different ways in which the Brown boys assembled in a group and subsequently interacted in the group were pathologized. Their differences were not read as social actions worthy of understanding, dialogue, or perhaps even teaching; instead they were categorized as deviant worthy of rebuke. Additionally and

others are eliminated altogether. To achieve coherence and in particular what O’Brien (in Coulter et al., 2007) calls story-truth, narrative “smoothing” may be necessary.

As I read what I have written about Ridley above, I realize that I have polished the story fairly well to convey one possible interpretation of his puzzling views of the Brown boys at a particular moment in his life. I fully realize, however, that it is only part of the story. There are many more narrative threads imbricated in this story. That is, Ridley’s multiple viewpoints of the Brown boys have been forged in the crucible of his life. There have been a variety of experiences that have knowingly and unknowingly fashioned Ridley’s perceptions. Most of these influences we will never know; very rarely are we privileged with personal and intimate stories of our interviewees. If we did, perhaps we would arrive at different understandings of our subjects.

curiously, Kirk emphasizes that the Brown boys were not “misbehav[ing] or swearing” as if these behaviours were normal or expected of them. Earlier in the interview, when describing some of the attributes of the Brown boys, Kirk stated, “they are quite foul- and potty- mouthed where every second word is a swear word ...” Given that Kirk viewed the Brown boys in this way, he had to make it clear to me that it was not the swearing that made this scene with the Brown boys deviant but the very manner in which they arranged themselves in groups.

Let me remain with Kirk. Outspoken, candid, and self-appointed barometer or representative of the general views of Montclair staff, Kirk shared thoughts and stories that others would not feel comfortable voicing in public. On this topic of the Brown boy congregating in large groups and doing so in atypical ways that did not reflect the decorum, code, or conduct of the dominant group, Kirk had a theory:

The reason, I think they [Brown boys] have this large group-thing going on is that they have this *group insecurity*. It is amazing! Some of these guys, you know, have this façade of being very tough. I have them in my office and they are just *an emotional mess*. Oh, *they cry, which is very disappointing!* Because if you are going to be a tough guy, then be a tough guy! Don't be a tough guys and then cry like a baby! And individually, they are *not well!* They are, well, I really *worry* about some of them.

The Brown boys', Kirk asserts, congregate in large groups because they suffer “group insecurity.” He believes that these Brown boys' are “not well” and that the bravado that they boast when they assemble in large groups is a camouflage for the insecurity that gnaws away at the core of their being. He claims when he is disciplining an individual Brown boy who is sitting in his office, cleaved asunder from the security of his group, “the kid is an emotional mess.” “They break down and cry.” He finds it insulting and hypocritical that in public, as a group, they put on an indomitable face but

in private, as individuals, they are cry babies. For Lisa, Kirk, Ridley, George and many of their colleagues, the perceptions and beliefs that orbit around the Brown boys need to congregate in large groups is rooted in pathology, deviancy, and inadequacy.

Intimidation

The theme of intimidation by the Brown boys surfaced repeatedly in interviews and discussions I had with all the teachers and most of the students. Only for the purposes of organization and analysis do I separate this theme of intimidation from the theme of congregation of Brown boys' in large groups. The two, however, are inextricably linked. Discussion of the intimidation factor of the Brown boys by most of the interviewees followed naturally after repeated references of the Brown boys congregating in large groups. Part of the reason that the Brown boys were intimidating was the very fact that they assembled in large groups, which when seen from the outside, was perceived as raucous, refractory, and deviant.

The sight of large number of boys standing around at any one time was distressing for most of the non-South Asian participants interviewed. Lisa, who compared the Brown boys to a pack of wolves above, also claims that the boys are so intimidating when they congregate in large numbers that a good majority of non-South Asian students who attend the school will consciously choose alternative walking routes—some which are much longer—to avoid the sight of these boys. She, too, claimed that there were times when she walked in another direction so that she could avoid the “throng of those boys who were loud and obnoxious.” Jack, the principal of the school, also comments on the “strength” of these boys when they convene in large groups.

The South Asian boys have a perception of being tough and that you do not want to mess with them. I remember overhearing a very loud

conversation with a teacher yelling at a group of kids. He was really upset. He mentioned, in his frustration, something to the effect that, “You wouldn’t be so tough if you were alone.” And you know what, he is right! I wouldn’t have thought of it that way but the numbers and the fact that there is community here, creates that sense of strength that perhaps wouldn’t be noticed if they hung around more as individuals. I think of South Asian boys in my previous context in my old school, where they were a significant minority, there wasn’t a cluster. There wasn’t enough for them to have a choice [to cluster or not]. There was more forced integration to the expense of loss of identity to some degree. So, our context is such that it is probably a blessing as well as a, [slight hesitation] well, there is at least two ends of that spectrum.

From the outset, Jack links the Brown boys to the perception of toughness and intimidation. He claims that the persona of toughness and might is important to the Brown boys. As the interview unfolds, he shares a few examples of how the Brown boys posture when in large groups “to let others know that they are in control.” He agrees with one of the teachers in his school, who he observed yelling at one of the Brown boys “you wouldn’t be so tough if you were alone.” Jack realizes that the large numbers of Brown boys in the school and the community provides them with a “sense of strength” that they may not have had “if they hung around more as individuals.” He believes that the large population of South Asian students in the school provides the Brown boy with a choice to congregate in large groups. Referring to his previous school as an example, he doubts that the formation of these large groups would occur if the population of the South Asian students were small. He believes that part of the strapping attitude of the Brown boys, which was indigestible to himself and many of the teachers at Montclair High School, is a result of their freedom to convoke in large numbers. One way for the school to decrease this “sense of strength” among the boys, Jack mentions, is to eliminate this freedom and thus regulate the size of their social groups. Jack and his colleagues tried to implement this new strategy, which I will examine in Chapter 10.

Most of the interviewees, when discussing the Brown boys' propensity to form large groups and their resulting swagger when in these groups, also described the imposing nature of these students and referenced how tall and large they are in stature. Callum notes, "These are big guys, well over six feet and scary; even when I am with them, I look lost; can you imagine how some of the female teachers or younger students feel?" Ava remarks,

They are huge, these guys; way taller than me. They dwarf me. Imagine 20 of these guys, all towering over your head, standing together wearing large puffy jackets. What impression do they give off? Of course, they know that people around them leave them alone. What impression does that give them then? I think this is highly problematic. It creates a sense of invincibility, which then makes their behaviour even worse. "Oh, I can get away with this and that; no one will challenge me!"

Ava, too, describes these boys' physical presence as imposing. She

"[Narrative inquirers] settle in, live and work alongside participants, and come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also the things not said and not done that shapes the narrative structure of their observations and their talking. ... It was being in the field, day after day, year after year, that brought forth a compelling sense of the long-term landscape narratives at work. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 67-68)

When Jack ended his remarks (above) by stating, "So, our context is such that it is probably a blessing as well as a, well, there is at least two ends of that spectrum," he turned his eyes away from me. He was embarrassed. He knew that I was aware of what he was going to say. He knew that not saying the word was just as damaging as saying it. He knew that by stopping mid-sentence and not saying the word, he had already divulged a perception that he did not want represented. He paused momentarily for me to determine which road he should take. He was aware, and I was aware, that my reaction would determine how he would continue. Would he need to cover up? Would he need to explain himself? Could he continue

believes that the Brown boys feel they are “invincible” not only because of their strength in numbers, but also by the intimidated reactions they read off the faces and body language of others around them. She finds this power that the boys possess “highly problematic” and believes that, unfettered, they will become ungovernable. This perception of intimidation and, at times, invincibility was not only firmly embedded in the psyche of the teachers interviewed, but freely traded, as fact, in their conversations. It was not uncommon to hear these perceptions repeated two or three times in the course of an interview with teachers and some educational leaders.

Many of the non-South Asian students and teachers truly believed that these boys intentionally assembled in unwieldy numbers to send everyone who attended Montclair High School a message that power resided with the Brown boys.

Conversely, the three South Asian

the interview believing that he didn't say what he didn't say and I didn't hear what he didn't say? In that moment, I could have labelled his predicament and named the elephant that suddenly occupied the room. I chose not to. I nodded my head and smiled in earnest acceptance. Perhaps if I hadn't spent time with Jack, I would have interrogated further. Perhaps if I hadn't observed Jack teach brilliantly and discipline his students so respectfully and share his lunch with a student and hold the door open for a group of students that were impervious to him and spend time appreciating the most recent student artwork on display and talk to his staff about equity for all and speak with unreasonable parents so magnanimously, I would have labelled it. Perhaps if I hadn't been “in the field, day after day” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I wouldn't have known that Jack did not believe that the Brown boys' were the opposite of a blessing; that it wasn't a slip. But fortunately I had spent time with him and I knew that a silent declaration of trust was what

educators whom I interviewed were confounded by the attitudes and behaviour of many of their colleagues. Each one of them, in varying degrees, felt that the Brown boys' received undue attention for their urge to socialize in large groups.

Although they were more empathic toward their colleagues about the intimidation factor of these boys, they still thought that the entire contention was hyperbole.

Preeti's comments below are representative of their thoughts.

So many of the staff here think that the Brown boys are nothing but gangsters, thugs, nuisances, and bullies. They are intimidating. They are afraid of them when they see the big groups of Brown boys in the rotunda. They won't go through that side of the rotunda [points]; they will rather go up the stairs on the other side which takes longer. I know all this through conversations with teachers and at staff meetings. I constantly hear: "These Brown boys should not be standing together! These Brown boys are too intimidating!" And if you asked the Brown boys why they stand in large groups, they would say that it provides them with a sense of identity. Standing together

was needed at that moment. By doing this, I also predicted that later on in the interview he would somehow weave in this precarious moment and clarify his intentions.

He did exactly that but in a way that I never expected. I was stunned.

By in large, despite the number of atrocious behaviours that kids display, there aren't many "evil kids"; there are some but just as there aren't many evil human beings, there aren't many evil kids. Sometimes, however, people will see that [evil] in some types of people. *As a community, I think, the South Asians are perceived to be, uh, well, perhaps, sometimes as who they are not.* Again, you get these perceptions of quote, unquote, teenagers. Often, I say, that if you are a group of kids regardless of ethnicity but because you are kids, rightly or wrongly, and you walk through a jewellery store, many of the eyes will be on you. That is what will happen. I think that the South Asian community, because of the bad press, are certainly considered most sinister thus all the South Asians in the community are blanketed with that statement.

Once again, Jack cornered himself into using a word that he did not want verbalized from his own mouth. Once again, he looked away when he realized where his sentence was going to lead him. Once again, he said the word without

provides them with a sense of who they are; they feel safe, they feel connected to each other. And being part of the Brown culture, it is just the norm to them, so-to-speak. But from the perspective of the White, or non-Indian teachers, they feel this behaviour is intimidating, which is ridiculous. They feel that the boys are trying to intimidate them as they walk through or around the rotunda. I can see that many of the Brown boys are big and they act tougher than they are but to complain about intimidation is beyond me! They are teachers for God's sake. Who in this situation is insecure? ... I wonder how much of it is to force the administration to do something about them [the Brown boys]. [Visibly upset] You know it is.

Preeti and the other South Asian teachers question the motives of their colleagues' reactions toward the Brown

boys and their desire to assemble in large groups. She accepts their contention that the boys are big and, at times, act tougher than they really are but japes at her colleagues' insinuations that the Brown boys are intimidating and negatively influence the social dynamics of the rotunda by their very presence. Disgusted, she questions whether her colleagues are more insecure than these teenaged boys who are supposed to be experiencing—according to the tenets of adolescent psychology—repeated bouts of uncertainty as they fashion their identities. Preeti's assertion is that even though the

saying it. This time he did not pause to wait for my reaction; he barrelled on speedily explaining how unjustly teenagers, in general, and the South Asian community, in specific, are treated. I am glad that the digital recorder was taping what Jack said for the next minute or so because I did not hear a thing. I was still stuck at how he chose NOT to see the South Asian community and the Brown boys. He chose NOT to see them in words that he could not verbalize. Why did Jack, not even two minutes after his first awkward moment, knot himself into a sentence that led him to a descriptor that he was thinking about but did not want to say? What other narrative threads were at work here?

Brown boys' assemble in large groups, the charge that they are intimidating is an exaggerated one and should be questioned for its intent. She speculates that this type of myth construction (Barthes, 1972) makes it easier for her colleagues to persuade the school administration to employ surveillance and disciplinary apparatuses that systematically disempower the boys and eventually force them into compliance. That is, she intimates the motivation of these teachers is to persuade school authorities to re-seize the power that the Brown boys countenance when in large groups. By "exaggerating" intimidation, these teachers are claiming that the Brown boys have far too much power in the school and that they should be stripped of it before someone—namely themselves—get hurt. Preeti derides her colleagues claim and instead points out that, as teachers, they are vested with authority to first, better understand the context and second, to problem solve with the Brown boys to arrive at solutions that are acceptable to everyone. To forbid these Brown boys from socializing in group sizes that many teachers find unnerving is oppressive and unjust. Not to dialogue with these students to explore possible solutions, for Preeti, was a major frustration. Watching her colleagues choose to invoke the positional authority of the school to "out power" these students was not only unfair, but corrosive to the wellbeing of these students. As she continues to share with me her disappointment, it becomes very clear that Preeti is seething at the thought of her colleagues overstating their concerns as a way to wrest power away from these boys.

Amrit, another South Asian teacher, was also frustrated with the gravity of her colleagues' deportment to the Brown boys, but interpreted the situation slightly

Preeti contends that the Brown boys congregate in large groups because it provides them with a sense of identity. She posits that this behaviour is "part of the Brown culture, it is

differently. She believes that the school consciously or unconsciously—she is not sure which—vilifies the Brown boys in order to re-entrench the power imbalances that secure minority status firmly to the bottom rungs of the “vertical mosaic” (Porter, 1965). In her words,

I was talking to a fellow [White] teacher; she was complaining to me about how the Brown boys are loud and intimidating. That they are obnoxious, they are rude, trouble making, up to no good, they don't have good etiquette, and don't care about anything. ... You know, Anish, I don't know what to do with all this sometimes. How do I react without over-reacting? All this is so wrong but I don't know exactly what to do about it. I don't know; I am still trying to grasp with it and deal with it appropriately and the venue is not to butt heads; the proper way is not to butt heads. You can't say to her or all of them [colleagues]: "You can't say that!" You have to have the right timing. But for them [colleagues], you know exactly where they are going with this. They are saying that “these people are uncouth and they don't act the way they should be acting. They are kind of like an embarrassment. They [colleagues and, more generally, dominant society] don't help them but instead dog²⁸ on them and guess

just the norm.” Earlier in the interview and in informal conversations I had with her, she made it clear to me that she “knows the culture of these kids.” She disclosed that she belongs to the Sikh community and has participated in numerous youth initiatives that have provided her with insights into many of the students' behaviours, needs, and values. Indeed, she probably has more insights into these students' culture than others in the school, but to state unequivocally that all the Brown boys belong to an amorphous category called “the Brown culture” is yet another example of *self-inscribed* essentialism that I discussed in Chapter 2. Certainly, most large groups create or possess a collective identity when they assemble in large groups and claim that they “feel safe and connected to each other.” Undoubtedly, this sense of fraternity can issue from sustained social interactions. However, can one conclusively claim that this need to convoke is a result of “Brown culture?” What is “Brown

²⁸ Put down; insult

what, in this way, they always keep them down.” You know, clear and outright racism is easier to deal with. I know what to do when someone swears at me or my dad, which he had a lot of in Clearwater where I grew up. It is still painful but much easier.

Amrit is unabashedly clear that the Brown boys are experiencing the duplicity and debilitating effects of systemic racism. She is confused, however, about how to deal with it. In fact, as the conversation unfolded, she felt completely incapacitated at the thought of defending the Brown boys and minoritized students in general. I will explore this observation of Amrit’s incertitude in dealing with these experiences of systemic racism in Chapter 10, but for the purposes of closing this point, I must highlight Amrit’s assertion that the Brown boys at Montclair High School are unfairly disparaged for the purposes of “keep[ing] them down.” She claims that instead of her colleagues duly attending to the challenges facing the Brown boys, they exacerbate

culture?” As I discussed in Chapter 1, how is it possible to conflate the multiple identities of students who are marked with different social locations, varying faith systems, and diverse socio-cultural traditions? Even if *all* of these students belong to the same faith or cultural group, can one attribute the need to socialize in large groups a function of that faith or culture? Is she guilty of “culturalizing” these students’ behaviours or is there something about the “Brown boys’ culture”— an extremely slippery term loaded with myriad of signifiers— that compels them to congregate in large groups? I suppose additional sociological or anthropological studies are required to gain further insight into these questions.

Nevertheless, from the field notes that I have gathered and my experiences as an educator, researcher, and “insider,” I would conclude that it is a faulty assertion. Brown culture, in the context that Preeti uses, includes far too many variables to be meaningful.

the situation by woefully complaining that they are “loud and intimidating,” “rude,” “obnoxious” and “no good.” Positioning the Brown boys in this disdainful way, Amrit believes, makes it easier for her colleagues to discontinue offering them support and assistance. Her colleagues’ rationale, Amrit implies, reads as follows: How is it possible to continue supporting a group of recalcitrant “trouble makers” who pride themselves in intimidating precisely the ones who want to help? In this way, Amrit believes that her colleagues and, the dominant society at large, fulfill their loftier hegemonic aim of securing the Brown boys to the lower rungs of the “vertical mosaic” (Porter, 1965).

Clothes

What the Brown boys’ wore became an identity marker that distinguished them from others in the school. All the interviewees, whether they were educators or students, commented, unsolicited, on the Brown boys’ apparel. The boys clothing, without exception, comprised a puffy *Northface* jacket, jeans and the latest iteration of the coolest athletic shoes. Gabriella’s comments are representative of the non-South Asian students’ perceptions of the Brown boys:

The Brown crew consists of the skipping guys. Talking on the phone in-class kind of guys. Bad boys. There is a certain brand of clothing they wear: Northface. Big puffy jacket thing. The latest runners. They think they are all so cool and tough —pretty much all talk, I say. No doubt, they are the shit starters.

Damien’s comments are representative of the non-South Asian educators’ perception:

It is an interesting dynamic with the Indo boys, like, they wear almost identical clothes. They have big puffy winter jackets. It may not be a gang thing but it is a belonging thing. ... They stand around with these puffy jackets which is [sic] obviously to make them look big. They already are big but the jackets make them look even more tough, which is what they obviously want.

For both Damien and Gabriella, the Brown boys' uniform-like clothing read as a missive: "Beware of me; I am tough. Don't mess with me." Both of them admitted that these boys were already tall and large in stature but once they wore their "puffy jackets," they looked even more imposing and threatening. They believed that this menacing and foreboding look was undoubtedly the Brown boys' implicit agenda.

Woven into this discussion of the boys' apparel was the matter-of-fact but oft-cited reference to gangs. Since these boys assembled in large groups and dressed in a way that appropriated gang couture, the majority of students interviewed either alluded to or accused outright the Brown boys of belonging to gangs. Given the prevalence of gang symbols—expressed through colors, brand-name merchandise, styles, and modes of wearing clothes (O'Neal, 1997)—both in popular culture and media reportage (Jiwani, 2006), there seemed to be a robust language available not only for the non-South Asian students but also for the Brown boys' to trade in this gang discourse. I will elaborate on this point in the section below and also in the next chapter. Nevertheless, to close this point, the accusation or suggestion that the Brown boys belonged to a gang was significantly influenced by the clothes they collectively chose to wear. Undoubtedly, these non-South Asian students considered other variables when they positioned the Brown boys as gang members; however, the manner in which the Brown boys' dressed was an important determinant that should be underscored. That is, dress was a significant marker that influenced how the Brown boys positioned themselves and, in turn, how they were positioned.

Gangs

Another theme that emerged in this study of how the South Asian male students were positioned and how they positioned themselves in Montclair High School was of gang involvement. Although the focus of this study was not to determine whether or not these students are involved in organized gang activity, I believe that it is my responsibility to remark on this topic that surfaced repeatedly in almost all of the interviews I conducted. I cannot, therefore, definitively substantiate or refute any claims about these students belonging to youth gangs. I can, however, shed some light on their behaviours toward and perspectives on gangs.

When describing the Brown boys in my formal interviews and informal conversations, the majority of the non-South Asian students used the term “gangs” frequently and carelessly.

Individually, the Brown crew are [sic] really good but when they are together in their gangs or crew or 3D they are cocky and stupid and mean. But what do you expect because that’s what happens. (Leighton)

It’s just because they [Brown boys] are such a big gang. If Caucasians are walking down the hall, there will be three of them; if those Brown guys are walking down the hall, there will be fifty of them, so right there, you can guess that it’s kinda iffy. You would see that the Caucasians would just turn around and walk away. If they didn’t, you knew what would happen next: The Caucasians would be harassed or they would have to squeeze through the Brown gang with their backs up against the walls while the Brown guys stare them down. Or the Brown gang would kick the garbage can right at them to let them know who’s the boss. (Danielle)

Yes, they [Brown boys] are not really that bad; I went to elementary school with so many of them. I would say that when you pick them out individually, they are not bad but when they are in their gangs, something happens; they influence each other to do bad things. It is the gang thing that really gets to me. They aren’t the crips or cash flo,²⁹ but they want to be especially with their POW or PWO or whatever they call themselves ... (Julie)

²⁹ Names of renowned gangs in the US

From my understanding of the context, the way the term was used, and how the Brown boys were positioned with respect to the term “gangs,” most of the non-South Asian students did not believe that the Brown boys actually belonged to any serious or organized gangs. They used the term to indicate that when the Brown boys were together, in large groups, they invited trouble. Individually, the Brown boys were affable and “really good”; when they convoked in large groups, however, their behaviour turned “iffy” and “mean.” By their use of the term “gangs,” it seemed that the non-South Asian students wanted to invoke and then adjoin these connotations of “criminality” and “delinquency” to the groupthink behaviour of the Brown boys. Indeed, in popular culture, the term “gang” conjures up images and conceptions of lawlessness, violence, larceny, and felony. It was seemingly these connotations that the non-South Asian students wanted to link with the Brown boys’ inclination to assemble in large groups. To reiterate, the boys transformed from nice guys, when alone to thugs, when in “gangs.” Hence, the designation “gang,” with all its robust connotations, best characterized this transformation. The usage of this term was yet another way to criminalize the behaviours of the Brown boys.

In Chapter 8, I examine the four themes of *large groups*, *intimidation*, *clothes*, and *gangs* that were featured in this chapter, through the perspectives of the Brown boys. In other words, how did the Brown boys position themselves when they discussed these four themes?

8. THE BROWN BOYS TAKE

In the previous chapter, I examined, systematically, how the Brown boys are pathologized by the criminalization of their attitudes, behaviours, and actions. In this chapter, using the same four dominant themes I employed in the last chapter—large groups, intimidation, clothes, and gangs, and an additional theme of blame, which every Brown boy in this study spoke about to me—I examine how both groups of the Brown boys—wannabes and hardcore—position their own identities. First, I examine how the Brown boys interpreted their proclivity of assembling in large groups. Second, I explore the theme of intimidation from the perspectives of the “wannabe” and hardcore groups of Brown boys. Third, I examine how the wannabes and hardcore group of Brown boys read their choice of clothing. Fourth, I explore how each group of the Brown boys—the wannabe and hardcore groups of Brown boys—interpreted the term “gang” with respect to their own identities. Lastly, I examine the Brown boys’ incessant claim of being blamed for everything that went wrong in the school.

Large Groups

Both groups of wannabe and hardcore Brown boys positioned themselves as insouciant, close-knit, and admittedly self-interested “buddies,” but they were very aware that their presence and reputation, especially in large groups, evoked in others—through no fault of their own, they argued—feelings of fear, malfeasance, suspicion, and disdain. Let me unpack this systematically. When the Brown boys were pressed to explain what is considered appropriate or normal for the size of a social group of friends, one Brown boy, Bal, candidly but firmly explained: “If five White guys hang in groups, they are considered friends. If five Brown boys hang in groups, we are a gang looking for

trouble.” For the majority of the Brown boys, this issue of congregating in large numbers was a complex issue but one that was equally as sensitive as it was to the educators and non-South Asian students in the school. Bal’s comment above—which is reminiscent of James (1998) piquant statement: “White people window-shop, Black people loiter” (p.168)—poignantly captures the vexation, confusion, and hurt of these boys. From my multiple conversations and interviews with these boys, it was evident that they saw the issue in contradictory ways. First, they were very aware of how they were read by the school. In other words, they clearly understood that congregating in large groups in the school hallway or rotunda provoked negative reactions from both their peers and the staff. They were aware that others, including staff members, were not only intimidated by the numbers in their group but by their general demeanour and behaviour when in that group. Many of the Brown boys not only acknowledged that they had been asked repeatedly by the staff at the school to form smaller groups, but they joked and laughed, sometimes heartily, about how they occasionally walked in large throngs to purposely, as Kas, a wannabe Brown boy says, “scare people.” Kas is candid:

Like, we are all Brown, just Brown, no White people. We hang together, sometimes 30 of us. I guess a lot of people are scared of us; they think we do a lot of bad stuff like drink during school and stuff like that. But we don’t. ... Sure, we scare people sometimes but mostly it’s just for fun. Sometimes if one of our crew’s been dissed by some White or Chinese guy or if some White guy does something for whatever reason, he will tell all his friends so now there will be 30 Brown guys facing the one White guy. What is the White guy going to do? [Chuckles] There are 30 Brown guys and one White guy even though it was originally between that one Brown guy and the White guy [shakes his head and continues to chuckle].

Awareness that others did not want them to congregate in large groups is one thing but agreeing with the sentiment or rule is another. According to the Brown boys it was a social need. They were simply friends hanging out; sometimes it would lead to fun, pranks, and antics, sometimes it would lead to “sending a message” to others but most of the time, it was fulfilling a need for companionship. Balbir and Gurjit explain:

For me, I guess, I myself am part of the Brown crew. Like there is a group of Grade 11 and 12’s that are Brown and we hang together. I don’t know why, coz, that’s just the way it is. We are just friends. ... Most of us have cars so we go out to eat or just sit around the tables in the rotunda and hang there. So usually, you will see a whole bunch of Brown people just standing at recess or lunch.

I don’t see what the big deal is. We are a bunch of guys that are there. For some of us, we know each other and we all grew up together because we live in the same area and went to the same elementary school. For some others, their parents may know each other so naturally their kids become friends and so they are part of a group.

Both Balbir and Gurjit could not understand the heavy handedness that hung over their heads when they formed their large groups. They knew, at times, they went overboard; however, the negativity, surveillance, and warnings they experienced on a regular basis were not commensurate to their actions. Most of them felt that the scrutinizing eye of the school was excessive and linked most definitely to something more than just their observable behaviours in the school halls.

<p>Intimidation</p> <p>As I examined in Chapter 7, most of the non-South Asian students and teachers interviewed conveyed that the sight of</p>	<p>"Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" Wittgenstein (2005; p.27).</p> <p>As I engaged in the dialectic of interviewing, transcribing, reflecting, and then</p>
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large number of boys standing around at any one time was distressing and intimidating. The Brown boys, particularly the wannabes and hardcore group, saw the issue in contradictory ways. What emerged from their varied responses were two distinct themes. The first theme of bewilderment reflects the collective impressions of the wannabe Brown boys. The second theme of resentment captures exclusively the collective convictions of the hardcore Brown boys.

Before I expound on the two themes, let me reiterate, there are not any watertight compartments with accompanying criteria for each category that differentiate these boys. The shifting notion of identities (Bhabha, 1995; du Gay, 2000; Gilroy, 1997; Mercer, 1990; Hall 1997a, 1997b, 2000; and Rutherford, 1990) illustrates that no one individual can be fixed in any one particular ontological category (Samuel, 2005). The two themes

once again, listening to the recorded interview while, at the same time, following along with the written transcript, it became increasingly clear to me that the quantity of text I had amassed for the non-South Asian students far outweighed the quantity I had accrued for the Brown boys. The balance was measurably skewed: An average of ten pages of transcript text for non-South Asian students versus five pages for the Brown boys. Anxious, like a high school student naively asking the teacher how many pages her written assignment needed to be, I embarrassingly dismissed my distress as vestiges of a persistent insecurity I have yet to conquer. The voices in my head, however, persisted: *I don't have enough information from the Brown boys. I have not adequately and fully represented them. I am doing my utmost at representing the Brown boys' schooling experiences, but am I unwittingly cannibalizing their voices and continuing the colonial legacy of privileging the voices of the dominant to speak for the minoritized?* I began to work even harder. Among other things, I

I am examining are not meant to categorically define these students. Instead, the themes—that emerged from the field notes that I collected and interpreted—are two possible ways to make sense of the Brown boys’ perspective of the charges of intimidation that are made against them.

First, although these wannabe Brown boys recognized that they congregated in large groups and that these large numbers possibly invoked fear in others, they were still bewildered as to why it was their burden to bare. These Brown boys asserted that if others, including their teachers, were intimidated by their large numbers, “why was it their problem”? For them, all others had to change their attitudes, not them. Whether or not others were intimidated was not their concern. They wanted to express who they were. As far as the wannabe Brown boys were concerned, others had to simply

began asking in my interviews with the Brown boys, more open-ended questions; ensuring I provided longer wait times; and articulating or legitimizing the emerging narrative threads hidden underneath the Brown boys’ responses, stories, and intimations so that, together, our dialogue was polyphonic and that the meanings we created occurred at “an intersection of two consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984; p. 289).

Despite all these initiatives, my interview transcripts for the Brown boys were still shorter with smaller word count totals. I knew all too well that comparing word totals was a facile exercise, but in spite of all this absurdity, I knew, deep down, there was something instructive in my disquietude. For the time being, I made peace with this phenomenon and assured myself I was truly doing everything I could possibly do. The peace did not last too long. Once I completed writing this chapter, I was, once again, overwrought with doubt. The voices began: *Why is the previous chapter almost twice as long as this chapter? Why do the non-South Asian*

accept who they were and how they socialized with others around them. They felt that they had every right to determine the size of their social unit and any interference from others was a contravention of their freedom. Bal questions rhetorically, “Why is [sic] groups of four or five good but fifteen not so good?”

By beginning with a narrative told by Tej, a hardcore Brown boy, I examine, below, the second theme of resentment.

I simply don't get it. Why does it hurt these White people so much that we all hang together?

My brother told me he, too, had to deal with the problem of groups when he was in school a few years back. His issue, however, was everyone making fun of him because of the number of people living in our house. He said he would hear crap like:

“Hey man, how come you guys have, like, a hundred people living at your house?” Or

“Hey, fuckin' raghead, doesn't the cemetery in your backyard have enough

interviewees have much more to say about the four themes—large groups, intimidation, clothes, and gangs—than the Brown boys? For one month, I stopped writing. I revisited and re-evaluated all my field texts, interviews, and emergent themes. Were my themes reflective or representative only of my non-South Asian interviewees? I re-read all the interview transcripts and analyzed all of my questions and comments I made after each response from the Brown boys. Could I have elicited more thoughts, meditations, or reflections by making different comments or asking different follow-up questions? Would the interview text of the Brown boys have looked different if I had interviewed them in another location other than Montclair High School? Certainly, the answers to all of these questions could be affirmative. A follow-up study with different parameters and protocols would certainly generate more and different insights to these and more queries. Nonetheless, my angst, uncertainties, and insecurities did

room for when all your relatives kick³⁰ or do you leave them in the basement to rot?" Or

"That pink house is a Sikh special: Fifteen tiny bedrooms for half of India but only one small shithole."

He said that wasn't the worst of it. He wouldn't tell me the comments that really hurt him because he knew that I'd flip. What he doesn't know is that I've already flipped. Many times. Those fuckin' KKK lovin' crackers! They don't cross MY path at this school. Everyone knows that here.

What I don't get is why even the teachers take a crap every time our crew are together: "Hey break it up; split up; move on; don't block the entrance!"

Shut the fuck up! Why can't we hang together? Don't you get it—we don't want to hang with you White asses! We are our own crew. It's our crew and everyone else. If they can't handle that—tough!

You know, it's not like what Raminder, my G says; he is so bloody wrong. He says that majority rules. Like, here in this school, it's mostly Chinese and Browns. Whoever wins the battle of this land, he is king. That's what Ram says. The winning group will be the kings—the Lions! But he's so wrong. He doesn't get it. It's not about majority; it's about who takes charge. Here in our school, the Chinese are the majority—just like they are in all of Rowling. But they don't take charge. I

allow me to discern a theme that up until then I had left invalidated and unarticulated. It became clear to me that the Brown boys' choice of speaking curtly—their hesitancy or resistance of sharing information or experiences freely—was actually a theme worthy of registering. This silence of the Brown boys throughout all my interviews was legitimate. Despite my best efforts and the relative success I experienced at unearthing some valuable schooling experiences of the Brown boys, there remained in the midst of my conversations with them, a silence I could not penetrate. They spoke but did so reluctantly. In spite of the comfort and safety I tried to create, there seemed to be a reservoir of language/experience that either they did not want to examine with me or that, for some reason, they could not examine or did not know how to examine. This intentional, unintentional, or unwitting inaccessibility of the Brown boys was a failing or challenge I could not scale.

There are probably many reasons for

³⁰ Die

don't know if they don't want to or they just don't have the balls to. Anyways, the point is that we do have the balls and that is why we're in charge. Everyone knows that. We have the power. Like Ram says—I guess he's right with one thing—we are the lions. In the animal kingdom, the lions rule. Everyone else follows. Here, we are the lions. We rule. Everyone else follows.

The second theme that emerged from my formal and informal conversations with the Brown boys was a compelling one. These hardcore students, which represented a small minority of the entire group of Brown boys, were an angry and defiant lot. The intimidation others felt toward them was not an accident; for these Brown boys—unlike the group of wannabe Brown boys I just described—it was very much their explicit goal. For a variety of different reasons, they wanted to prove to all their peers and teachers that the locus of social power in the school resided with them. As Tej's narrative above attempts to illustrate, this group of Brown boys wanted “to take charge.” It

the existence of this silence. I thought of Taigue (1994) speaking about her identity as a Native American:

We learned how not to be ourselves. Around strangers, words were spoken carefully or not at all. Silence became a strategy for survival. But we had to comprehend its subtle complexity, recognize its disguises. We came to understand silence as a power rhetorical tool which cuts and gives shape to sound and meaning—not to confuse it with the inarticulate and illiterate, or the inchoate place of nonbeing, the silence of suppression, a void which lends itself to shame and insecurity. (p. 299-300)

Was this silence a legacy of the students' minoritized and disenfranchised history? Was it for them a “strategy of survival”? Were these boys carefully choosing words that helped them navigate around these silences? If so, was it difficult for them to choose the right words, which I observed as stark instances of inarticulateness? Perhaps. I concluded reluctantly that another inquiry would better be able to assay and uncover these queries.

I must admit, however, on more than one

did not matter whether or not they were the majority in the school; for Tej it was about seizing the reins of power that were available for anyone in the school who had the penchant and mettle. For Tej, it was his group of hardcore Brown boys that had the appetite. No one could question they had the resolve. They showed it in their demeanour and behaviour. They were the uncontested “lions” who ruled the “animal kingdom” of the school.

To ensure that social power resided with them and their identity of lions was intact, they enacted, from time to time, “rituals” of intimidation and aggression. These rituals varied in dimension and magnitude. Some rituals were random, others were pre-determined and calculated. Although the random rituals varied, the underlying intent always seemed to be the provocation of fear and terror in others. So, each time some of the boys in the group ripped down a poster donning the

occasion, I was shocked and dismayed by the inarticulateness of the Brown boys. There were times that the inchoate language of the Brown boys to express meaningful thoughts about their experiences featured more prominently than the actual message they were trying to convey. That is, I began focusing on their struggle with words than actually listening to what they were trying to say. However inexcusable, during these moments, I could see how uninformed and deficit thinking educators could conclude that these students are indeed illiterate and unintelligent.

Reference to the symbol of a lion appeared several times in the course of my interviews with these Brown boys. Even though I knew that in some cultures or their cultures the lion pulsates with deep socio-religious connotations and, as I have already explained, this is a domain that I do not want to enter, I found myself pondering for hours about its possible implications. I mention this point explicitly to acknowledge that to excise

faces of peers running for student council; played keep away with a book of a grief-ridden student attempting desperately to retrieve it; or kicked open, suddenly, the toilet stall of a student who was defecating, they all laughed hysterically, all the while believing that they controlled the social power of the school. Each time they got away with it, the degree of invincibility they felt as a group increased. Each time they got away with it, their next random “ritual” would perhaps be even more daring. Each time they did not get away with it, they feigned aghast, pretending to wonder why their teachers were so upset. Each time they did not get away with it, they would attempt to dismiss their detestable actions as though it was “just a joke; c’mon lighten up!” (Balbir).

Another random ritual of note was a “stare down,” where a group of boys glared unceasingly at an individual or

religion from this discourse is an artificial and paralyzing proposition. It is placing a blatant blinder on this study. The potential insights that its inclusion could have offered is particularly disturbing to me. Nevertheless, for the reasons that I have already outlined, I must shut the door to a possible world of rich insight and analysis that could have issued from its inclusion.

Additionally, for Tej, and other South Asian male students, the discourse of home—where they lived, who they lived with, and how they lived—was a particularly sensitive issue that required time, comfort, relationship, and deftness to even mention. Home, for me too, was a particularly provocative and touchy issue. Every mention of home and the valence of thick associations that orbited around the term triggered off my own ardent associations.

As we compose our narrative beginnings, we also work within the three-dimensional space, telling stories of our past that frame our present standpoints, moving back and forth from personal to the social, and situating it all in place. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 70)

groups of individuals who they wanted to intimidate or terrorize. At times, depending on the message they wanted to communicate, the boys would follow “their target” around the school all the while maintaining their glare. Calculated rituals included pulling fire alarms at strategic times of the school year, lighting a fire cracker in the boys’ washroom, or even blowing up a toilet. Each ritual, however, made a statement that was visible to all: “we are the lions. We rule. Everyone else follows.”

Clothes

For the Brown boys’, their responses were consistently coherent depending on which “group” they identified with. For the first group or wannabes, dress became one of the many intimidation strategies that increased their social power in the school. Like an army uniform, this group of Brown boys wore their big puffy *Northface* jackets to signal to others that

Following the authors’ direction yet again, I recount two of my deeply personal associations.

One and half years before my family and 80,000 other Asians were expelled from Uganda—my birthplace—my father and mother had just completed building their dream home. It was not their life savings but their life’s hopes and promises that left a warm glow in the hearts of all who visited their home in those few idyllic days that preceded purgatory. Like a thief in her own house, before stealing away to Entebbe airport to board the two United Nations humanitarian airplanes waiting to depart to our sanctuary of Canada, my mom walked into each of the rooms of our house in the dark. My dad had cut off the generator so that no one could even accidentally turn on a light switch. In the dark, even the house knew to hold her breath so that no one—not even my nanny or our house security guard—could entertain a thought of a double-cross to tip off the militia of our

they were one cohesive social unit that should be feared. In fact, the puffy jackets were not only an identity marker that distinguished the Brown boys from their peers but they acted as a form of symbolic armour that provided the boys with a sense of invincibility. They knew that their jackets were a talking point among their peers. They read from the reactions of others that they looked intimidating. They heard from the teachers a disdain about their jackets. All this knowledge thrilled them. It only strengthened their resolve to continue behaving in a manner that was defined by the school as recalcitrant and obnoxious. Very rarely did they remove their jackets in the school. Even in subject classes they attended, they left their jackets on despite requests or admonitions made by their teachers to take them off. The jackets were part of their identity of a tough and intimidating group of bad boys

escape. Standing at the threshold of each door, my mom, a cartographer in the dark, quickly identified the most conspicuous point of each room. There she left a carefully folded thick stack of thousand shilling notes wrapped with a ribbon of lace torn from her wedding dress shawl. Unaware of my mom's ritual, my dad summoned her to hurry up: "They won't hold the plane for you." His admonitions were always in Gujarati. Having completed thirteen rooms, she knew that she only had time to lavish one more room: Her first son's room—my room—or my study, which she had fully furnished for me even though I would not begin PS³¹ 5 in two more years. She chose my room, even though the study was closer. She carefully set next to my cherished stack of Beezer and Topper comics, the thickest folded crescent of thousand shilling notes—a sandwich originally intended for two rooms. What I

³¹ Primary standard or grade

at Montclair High school. For the wannabe group of Brown boys, they did not want this identity disrupted in any way. Despite the resulting surveillance and frequent trips to the principal's office, they savoured the social power all these antics and stratagems generated.

For the hardcore group of Brown boys, the response was much different. Like other matters, which I will elaborate on shortly, they, as a group, chose to remain particularly silent. They were very aware of their image and the attention it provoked, but they refused to admit it consciously. They refused to admit what they wore was a matter of conscious decision-making. Instead, they acted as though wearing the same look was a coincidence or a random act of chance. When I pressed them in interviews or in casual conversation during their lunch breaks in the rotunda, most of these students treated the entire issue with either

learned years later was that the benediction left by my mom in each room was her clever way to preserve the dignity of the house—a marauder will less likely ravage homes with booty in plain sight.

With her benediction almost but not quite complete, we flew to Canada, our sanctum and new home, which at that time my parents did not know would be the only other place —albeit decades later— where they would own another home. Until then, in Vancouver, we lived in a series of basement suites whenever we were fortunate enough to be rented one. Despite carrying out the most punctilious rental searches, my dad would strike out at securing even the shoddiest of basement suites—the only available housing we could afford at that time. Either it was my father's accent on the phone or the color of his skin, when we went to see the house that would trigger the words: "Sorry, it's rented" from the lips of potential landlords. Whenever we

humour or feigned indifference. Some of the times, they laughed off my inquiries.

Other times, they shrugged their shoulders and acted as if not to hear my question. When I pushed or re-phrased my question, especially in the formal interviews, they treated my question as irrelevant or as an irritation. To illustrate this point, I cite an excerpt of an interview conversation I had with Arjeet.

Anish: I noticed that you and your crew always seem to wear the same kind of jackets; it's the same one you are wearing right now. Why?

Arjeet: [matter-of-factly] We always wear puffy jackets. I don't know why but that is the way it is.

Anish: Did you all decide to choose the same Northface brand or the same color jacket?

Arjeet: [Silence, which I allowed for approx 30 seconds.]

were fortunate, however, to secure a basement level floor of an old home and were privileged to stay for longer than one year, it was the other unspeakable challenge of laying our home bare for others to see that became an issue.

I did not know which was worse: Not finding a house to rent or endlessly making excuses to prevent my friends from coming over to my home. When my friend, Kim Lundquist, asked me why my house stunk and if we could play outside, I never once invited any of my friends to my home again. I was acutely aware that my home did not compare to the extravagances of most of my friends' homes. Although I had always been hyper aware of our poverty, I had risked every now and then a close friend to enter my intimate and private space of home. After Kim Lundquist's dagger in my eye, however, I never allowed, ever again, anyone to humiliate my way of life, which, for some reason, I equated to the smell of

| my house—my outer body.

Anish: *Is there a reason or story behind this choice?*

Arjeet: [Shrugs and remains silent]

Anish: *Do you think others in the school are aware that you wear similar jackets?*

Arjeet: Yah, so? [Defensively]

Anish: *[Feeling like I had to offer an explanation to my question and diffuse the defensiveness I interpreted he was feeling by his body language and facial expression] What people wear usually tells others something about who they are, even if it is something small. I thought by wearing the same color Northface jackets you all are communicating a message or something to others. If you are, I was wondering what the message is, if, of course, there is a message?*

Arjeet: [detached] We just wear these jackets. That's it. We just like to wear them.

Gangs

As I mentioned in the last chapter, another theme that emerged in my inquiry of how the South Asian male students were positioned and how they positioned themselves in Montclair High School was of gang involvement. Although the focus of my study was not to determine whether or not these students are involved in organized gang activity, I do believe it is appropriate to remark on this topic that surfaced repeatedly in almost all of the interviews I conducted. I cannot definitively substantiate or refute any claims about these students belonging to youth gangs. I can, however, shed some light on how they positioned themselves with respect to this theme.

Wannabe Group of Brown Boys

The wannabe group of Brown boys revelled in the attention they received about belonging to gangs. To hear from others that they belonged to gangs only added to their

identity claims. They used this “perception” as a way to perpetuate their identity of tough and intimidating boys. The loose accusations that these Brown boy belonged to gangs were seen as “free advertising,” as one Brown boy cleverly stated, to sell their desired image. They wanted to position themselves as intimidating and raucous boys in search of the soft spots of Montclair High School so that they could get away with mischief. To reiterate, as far as I could tell, these boys' actions did not grow out of a malevolent intent to hurt or injure others. They were mischief seekers recklessly delighting in the power they felt as a large group. They were opportunists taking advantage of and thus perpetuating an essentialist image of a villainous South Asian male wreaking havoc in the suburbs of Vancouver. Most of the students in this group of wannabes stated that they did not care if adopting this image meant that others believed they belonged to organized gangs. They were more concerned about preserving their "image" of tough boys. As long as they were able to accrue the desired benefits from what this image could provide, they were fulfilled. However, as we will see in Chapter 11, they had a very difficult time accepting the consequences that went along with this image. They enjoyed the dubious status without wanting to experience any of the concomitant consequences.

The Hardcore Group of Brown Boys

Again, I must reiterate, whether or not the hardcore group of Brown boys belonged to organized gangs was not information that I was able to gather. This group of Brown boys were reticent about sharing any of their thoughts about gangs. For whatever reason, they simply did not want me to broach the subject. From what others said about the hardcore group of Brown boys and observing their behaviours in the classrooms and social spaces of the school, I could infer that they were part of a loosely organized

fraternity where certain codes, rules, and behaviours governed their actions. I observed the enactments of some of these codes in a variety of different social settings, which I attempted to debrief with them in formal and informal conversations. Despite these attempts to engage them in conversations, they consciously chose not to talk to me about any of these or related occurrences. Unlike all the other South Asian males who willingly answered my queries—and in fact, shared stories about their lives unsolicited—this group of hardcore Brown boys were selective in what they chose to speak to me about. In particular, they were reticent in areas that concerned their relationships with each other. There existed, what seemed like for me on the outside, a code of silence that I could not penetrate. Again, perhaps if the aims and methods of my study were different and the sites of my observations and interviews varied from the restrictions of the four walls of the school, I would have encountered a different set of experiences that would have yielded different meanings relevant to this area.

Two clarifying points are in order. Although these group of Brown boys', whom I have designated as hardcore, were particularly reticent about sharing their thoughts about this subject of gangs, perhaps I could have unearthed worthwhile insights if I exploited my identity status of/as an "insider." As I discussed in Chapter 3, if I had interacted with these boys in a way that displayed to them, among other behaviours, that I was on their side; that I shared in their resentment or anger toward all types of authority; and that I was willing to trade in their discourse of secrecy without betrayal, perhaps I would have been able to enter even deeper into the multitudinous and layered narratives at work in my inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). That is, perhaps I could have moved deeper into the three-dimensional narrative space in which I conducted my research of the experiences of these Brown boys in Montclair High School if I had established a deeper trust with these students. I believe I was capable. I experienced many possibilities and opportunities.

However, the manner in which I would have to develop relationships with these boys would have been dishonest. As I have explained, I would have had to develop a relationship with the boys that would have violated my identity as a narrative inquirer for *this* particular study. More importantly, however, it would be a relationship that I would not have been able to maintain or honour once the inquiry was complete. That is, if my goal included long term work or even advocacy for these students instead of investigating their school experiences, perhaps I would have engaged in different relationship building strategies. Perhaps I would have shared my disgust with Jas when he fumed that he was compared to a dead drug dealer. Perhaps, I would have placed my hand on Kal's shoulder and offered to help him work through the challenges that he and his family suffered at the hands of his alcoholic father. If the parameters of my study were different, perhaps I would have done more than to simply suggest counselling resources for Kal and his family to contact—which, incidentally, he chose not to pursue when I spoke to him two months after the completion of my interview process with him. Perhaps these and more interventions would have allowed me to penetrate further into the inner world of these hardcore Brown boys, which in turn may have birthed more insight into their thoughts about gangs and other matters. If I had, however, I would have violated the very core of my identity as a narrative inquirer of this study. In summary, drawing boundaries around my identity as a narrative inquirer and thus limiting the relationship that I could have developed with these hardcore group of Brown boys prevented me from gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences.

The second clarifying point: An incident that I experienced with this group of hardcore group of Brown boys may have limited me from gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences and, perhaps even, damaged my relationship with them. Let me contextualize. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, for almost eight months, when I was not interviewing students or educators, I spent day-after-day observing in classrooms and other social spaces in the school.

The bulk of the time I positioned myself in visible social spaces to unobtrusively observe the South Asian male students interact in the school milieu. Unlike the hardcore group of Brown boys, the wannabes Brown boys, as I have explained, engaged in negative behaviours to determine how I would react. Particularly, in the first few weeks of the inquiry, the wannabes tested my boundaries; I realized this in hindsight after the throat-slitting gesture incident I experienced with Nardev. The wannabes wanted to determine the nature of my authority. The hardcore group of Brown boys, however, did not test me. They chose to ignore me. Or, they truly did not care that I was present in their social environment. They seemed self-absorbed, ostensibly unconcerned about those around them. Essentially, they had very little to do with me. Except on one occasion.

The lunch break began as it did the same way a hundred of other times that I observed. I stood on the second floor observing the reticulum of students below in the open mouth of the rotunda. As I was watching the lively interactions of five female students in hijab at a table below, I was struck by two hardcore Brown boys—whose names I later learned were Ajeet and Ram—walking by me toward the staircase, which led down to the rotunda. Approaching the staircase, Ram looked behind him to Parminder—whom I recognized from Manny’s wannabe group—who was standing across from me. Neither one of the three boys noticed or cared to notice me. A signal was exchanged with their eyes. With a noticeable limp, which I discovered later was a congenital hip defect, Parminder walked over to a far wall and pulled the fire alarm. I sprinted toward Parminder and grabbed his arm before he fled. The torrent of profanity directed to me began after he glanced over to Ajeet and Ram, who hadn’t moved from the top of the stairs. They ignored Parminder but with stone cold eyes, they both stared at me. Either they recognized me for the first time or they recognized in me something for

the first time. Whichever it was, my relationship with Ajeet, Parminder, and the rest of the hardcore group of Brown boys changed dramatically.

Before this incident happened, I had only interviewed four of the eight hardcore Brown boys whose names Nardev had disclosed to me. Curiously, Ajeet and Ram were two boys I had not interviewed. Further, Ram was the Brown boy who made the slitting-the-throat gesture to Nardev. Although more reserved than the wannabe Brown boys, four of the eight hardcore students whom I had interviewed shared with me some of their school experiences. After this incident, however, all four of these same boys—including Nardev—were particularly taciturn and supercilious with me. Any of my casual greetings or informal attempts to small talk fell on deaf ears. If one or two of them did respond, which happened very rarely, their words were restrained and chilly. Ram, whom I was yet to interview, decided that he no longer wanted to participate in this inquiry. He never notified me formally but instead he did not show up to any of his scheduled interviews. Four times he scheduled appointments with me. Four times he did not show up. Four times he did not bother to let me know that he would not show up. I do not know whether or not his actions were intentional but after the fourth snub, I did not bother to re-schedule. He never spoke to me about it and neither did I.

The other boy, Ajeet, graciously showed up for his interview, but during most of the interview chose to be uncommunicative and disobliging. He sat slouched on his chair and rarely made eye contact with me. He chose to answer his phone three times, never once offering an explanation or a simple "excuse me." In fact, during his third phone call, he kept me waiting for almost five minutes. His responses to my interview questions were curt and, at times, churlish. He acted as if the interview was a great burden and a monumental waste of his time. At about the half way point of the interview with Ajeet, I was so irritated by his nonchalant and ornery attitude that I wanted to end the interview. Believing that I could possibly turn the interview around—which I had

done so a few times already in this study—and perhaps even gain some insight into his attitude toward me and possibly the school, I plodded on. When I realized that the interview was not going anywhere, I raised the fire alarm incident and asked him point blank:

Anish: Were you and your crew upset with me when I turned in Parminder for pulling the fire alarm?

Ajeet: No. [silence]

Anish: What did you think or feel about that experience.

Ajeet: Nothing.

Anish: What did you think about me stepping in like that?

Ajeet: Nothing. Sup to you.

Anish: What did you want to say to me when you saw me holding Parminder's arm?

Ajeet: Nothing.

Despite my efforts to disarm and diffuse the tension, Ajeet did not open up or change his behaviour. He finally ended the ordeal when he cut me off mid-sentence and asked me if the interview was over. As I responded, "If you wish," he stood up and left. While he walked out the door to the room, I thanked him for the interview to which he responded: "Whatever" and kept walking.

As I thought about this interview in the ensuing days, I wondered whether or not I should have handled the "fire alarm" incident differently. Should I have spoken to all three students and debriefed the incident instead of allowing silence to calcify the entire experience? Should I have raised the issue with Ajeet earlier on in the interview, which may have allowed me to mend or rebuild this relationship? How did this incident damage my relationship with this group of hardcore Brown boys? If I had not grabbed Parminder's arm and eventually reported him to the administration, would I have cultivated a deeper relationship with these boys and hence, uncovered

more insights into this inquiry? I was certainly agitated and dismayed for days by the way I managed this entire experience.

Nevertheless, returning to the interview experience, despite Ajeet 's indifference and, at times, indignant looks, I maintained a decorum of kindness and gratitude throughout the interview, which when I reflected upon days after the interview, I was proud of exercising. I could not reveal to him my own inner feelings of resentment for the way he had treated me. I had to detach myself from the emotions that I was feeling. I recalled the conversations of some teachers I had interviewed and now understood, with even more empathy, their experiences of frustration and exasperation, which they experienced with these boys on a day-to-day basis. I empathized with these teachers who told me how infuriated they were with the Brown boys' flippant attitude to many of their questions or requests. Many of these same teachers admitted to me that the way they managed to "cope" with their behaviours was to disassociate from the students. They did not want to deal with them. They did not want to invest in them. It was too hard to engage with these students emotionally. Hence, as a survival mechanism, many of these teachers cut their emotional ties with the Brown boys.

Blame and Surveillance

Aside from the deficit manner in which they were positioned, which I will be examining in Chapter 9, the Brown boys, as a group, were most tortured and hurt about being blamed for everything that went wrong in the school. With blame comes surveillance and for the Brown boys, both of these practices were an assault on their character and reputation and an incursion into their privacy. Studies linking race, crime, and media are well documented (see Ericson 1991; Goodey, 2001; Henry et. al. 1996; and Jiwani, 2006). Persistent and recurrent reporting of crimes allegedly committed by a distinct minoritized group often induces a faulty perception that every member that shares

any kind of resemblance to this group has a predisposition to crime (Goodey, 2001). Moreover, repetitive reportage of such crimes not only leads to a moral panic against these groups, but compels, often in the form of a public outcry, authorities to enact measures to arrest or curb the perceived threats (Jiwani, 2006). One such outcome of this ferment is racial profiling: A veritable pathos of our times.

In their conversations with me, the Brown boys professed that they dwell in this ferment. They claimed that they live, both in and out of school, under the shadow of this kind of scrutiny. Despite the “tough guy” image they attempted to sell to the entire school, ironically, they repeatedly conveyed to me that they felt as though they were constantly under suspicion. Raj is categorical: “It’s like we wear those striped uniforms that convicts wear in prisons. Any problems, catch the nearest Brown guy. I hate it when they just come after us with no proof!” Every single Brown boy that I interviewed complained that he was unfairly profiled. Each complained that teachers in the school expected him to engage in misbehaviour. Almost every one of them stated that his behaviours were viewed with cynicism. They were seen as always being up to no good. Pavitar explains: “Even when we are just standing in the rotunda talking and laughing, the lunch monitors will come and ask us, like, what are we up to? They think, like, we are doing something illegal. We are minding our own business, c’mon, leave us alone.” From the impassioned comments of the Brown boys, it seems as though their actions and behaviours in public are particularly scrutinized and possibly even viewed as born of mal intent. In other words, they claim that they are seen with eyes that look for criminality. Their behaviours are “read” solely from a lexicon of transgression. Gurjit, in the narrative below, is piquant.

Gurjit

I know this sounds harsh but sometimes I feel like one of those Jews who was accused of everything by the Nazis. In social studies this year, Mr. Whitehead told us that according to the Nazis, everything that was wrong in the world was because of the Jews. They were blamed for everything, even the way they looked. It's kind of like that for Brown people right now. Not as harsh of course because the Jews went through all that extermination and stuff. But it is like, everything wrong that happens, it must be the Indo-Canadians. Like in our law class, we always talk about crimes and gangs and our teacher always brings up Indo-Canadian this and Indo-Canadians that. He says that a lot of the crime has to do with the Indo-Canadians.

Its like, the news was on at home a while back and the reporter announced that a Surrey man was shot. My parents and my older sister were like, "Oh, please don't let it be one of us, oh, please don't let it be one of us." It was pretty pathetic. I did kinda know what they were feeling. It's like school; when something goes wrong, if there is a seal bomb in the toilet or someone pulls the fire alarm or there is a fight, you know what everyone is thinking. Everyone automatically thinks that it is one of the Brown boys. It's what everyone thinks. If my parents and sister were at school every time something went wrong, they would probably say, "Oh, please don't let it be one of us" here too.

I have a Brown cousin in Prince George whose car went into the river. Everyone was looking for him but by the next morning, the police stopped the search. My sister told me that because he was an Indo-Canadian male, the police stopped looking for him. She told me that the police thought he was probably a gang member up to no-good so "what was the point in saving him. It is just a waste of tax payer's money". My sister's gone through a lot with her boyfriend; she's seen a lot and after that English Bay incident, she says that we should all be dta's³². She was sitting in a circle with her friends at English Bay, amidst hundreds of thousands of people, watching the fireworks when a couple of police officers came up to her crew and informed them that they were all going to be searched because they had heard that "some Brown guys are carrying weapons". After the humiliating search, she was even more pissed at the officers because as they were leaving they scowled, "We're going to keep an eye on you guys". Any time she or someone she is with mentions police, she spits out the descriptor: "Fuckin' racist profilers."

This is no different than when my friend, Jas, was compared to a dead drug dealer by the principal. I was like, you are supposed to be influencing us in a good way but instead you are comparing us to dead drug dealers? That really shocked me. Jas is not like that; he has issues but he isn't like that. Everyone thinks that he is like that because of who he

³² Don't trust anyone

hangs with and the way he looks and acts but he isn't like that. What I am saying is that its not just Jas, it's all my crew. Like, Nav's phone rang accidentally in science class and Mr. Rubell takes his phone away and sends him down to the office. A couple of days earlier, a White girl's phone rings and Rubell gives the phone back to her at the end of the class. Or when we were going on a fieldtrip and Parm walks onto the bus with a can of pop but the teacher made him spill it out but when he climbed back into the bus there were like ten guys and girls with pop cans in their hands. Or for me one day I wasn't feeling very good and I needed some Advil so I asked if I could get some but the teacher thought I would go and wander the halls or something so he tells me, "You need to come back right away; if you aren't back in ten minutes, I'll call the principal." Stuff like that just ticks you off, you know. It really makes me feel bad.

The spectre of the violent South Asian male identity envelopes itself around the Brown boys leaving for display only the expectation and inevitability of menace. Gurjit describes this spectre—the attitudes and perceptions of others—that position them not only in school but outside of school. He knows they are seen a certain way. He states that most adults expect that the Brown boys will engage in deviant or criminal behaviour. If they don't engage in misbehaviour, it is considered an anomaly. If they do engage in misbehaviour, it is expected and simply reinforces their perceived propensity for criminality. The next bad behaviour, then, becomes not only easy to predict but expected. In fact, according to Gurjit and all of the Brown boys I interviewed, the belief that they will engage in deviant or criminal behaviour has become so entrenched in the minds of law officers, lunch monitors, and teachers, they feel justified to interrogate the Brown boys on a whim or a suspicion. The Brown boys think they are targets; they believe their behaviours are unjustly monitored by lunch supervisors and teachers. They feel this excessive scrutiny is oppressive and unjustified. From Gurjit's experiences, it is evident that this type of surveillance and inquisition has affected how and what these boys think. For example, to believe that a search for a missing person was called off because of race or ethnicity—whether it is true or not—must have a profound impact on these boys

confidence for authority figures to always remain trustworthy, fair and committed to social justice. To believe so strongly, as these boys conveyed to me over and over again, that they cannot count on authorities to practice fairness has led many of them to respond in many different ways. One such reaction is anger and disgust toward teachers. I invite Jas to describe the injustice he feels.

Jas

They always blame us for everything that goes wrong in the school anyways. Anything bad happens, round up the Brown boys! Graffiti: Oh, it must be the Brown boys. Someone's ipod is missing: Oh, it must be the Brown boys! Broken window: Oh, it must be the Brown boys. Someone pissed on the toilet seat: Oh, it must be the Brown boys!

Like Ms. Drexl's missing ipod. It goes missing and she blames me. She said that she just asked me because she thought I might have seen it since I sit closest to her desk. Right! She didn't ask Amy, the Chinese girl who also sits next to her desk. Why? In fact, I found out that I was the only one she asked. Why? Because she thought I did it. She thought I was the ipod thief. She didn't ask the Filipino guys in the back. They do more bad shit than all of the Brown crew. But, no, they always blame us. She blamed me!

The next day, while she was saying something to the class, I cut in and asked the class if she had asked anyone about her missing ipod. I didn't think of this plan; it was Gurjit's idea. He knew how pissed I was so he told me to put her on the spot in front of the class. He's the smart one in our crew. So I did. The bitch tells me not to interrupt her and if I have a problem with her to speak to her after class. I ignored her; I just kept repeating in front of the class, "Did you ask anyone else about your ipod?" Before sending me down to Mr. Rory, she yells how disrespectful I am. Me disrespectful? Me? She was the one who dissed me. She blamed me for taking her fucking ipod. Yeah, I took her ipod so I could listen to her fuckin' Beethoven shit. Right. In the end, I got her: She never answered my question in front of the class and Nav, my crew, who is also in the class, said that she didn't say anything after I left; all she did was turn red and blue. He laughed when he told me, "And they call us fuckin' coloured people!"

The parabola that emerges persistently from these and other interviews is distinct:

If something bad happens, the Brown boys are to blame. They are the source of all

problems in the school. If a theft occurs, it must be linked with the Brown boys. If a fire alarm is pulled, chances are, it must have been the Brown boys. If firecrackers are set off in the rotunda, the main social space of the school, more than likely, the Brown boys are the culprits. These narratives of the Brown boys as delinquents or criminals were prominent in all the interviews. As Meera, a female Muslim student who chooses to wear a hijab, stated: “If they [Brown boys] do something they would be treated much harsher than if we, a group of hijab wearing girls, would. The lunch supervisors would give them more attention in the rotunda. If something goes wrong, they are the first ones to be approached.” This criminalized view of the Brown boys was part of the cultural narrative of the school. Sean, a student who identifies himself as “half Indo-Canadian and half White” captures the pulse of this narrative well:

Whenever anything bad happens they [teachers] target them [Brown boys] first and then they look around. I have other friends too but when I hang out with the Brown crew, we get into trouble way more than when I hang around with my other friends. When something happens, they target us and once they are sure it isn't us, then they try to find someone else. For example, my friend, Jas has been kicked out of school a few times and if anything happens, they go after him and talk to him first—it doesn't seem right. There are so many kids in the school, but why them; the finger is always pointed to them.

To recap, based on my organization, interpretation, and analysis of the data, I have proposed that the Brown boys at Montclair High School are pathologized in two dominant ways: criminalizing and deficit thinking. In Chapter 7, I examined how the Brown boys are pathologized by the criminalization of their attitudes, behaviours, and actions. In this chapter, I examined how the Brown boys positioned themselves using the same categories that were employed by others to pathologize their identities. In the next

chapter, I examine the influences of deficit thinking: The second dominant way that the Brown boys are pathologized.

9. DEFICIT THINKING

I've never seen a Brown student be a teacher's pet. Everyone knows that teachers have favourites but I've never seen a teacher favour a Brown student. I know that a lot of teachers think Indo-Canadian kids don't participate in class; they think we just shit around. I know they think that we aren't bright, skip classes, and don't care about our work or marks. I think part of it is true; some of us don't give a shit about our marks or homework. But many of us do. Like in Mr. Rubell's science class: I like science but Jas doesn't. Actually, I really like science because everything looks so simple but deep down, everything is so complex. Waves crash on the shore naturally but all the invisible pushes and pulls that tug at the center of the earth to make it happen are so mysterious and complex. I like that. I don't always get good marks but I like the mind candy of science. Jas doesn't get science; in the beginning of the year he gave it a shot but he did badly. He doesn't get it the way he gets people. He reads people not books. He says you can find truth by looking into eyes not words. Instead of asking Jas why he's struggling or whether he needs help, Mr. Rubell just ignored him. He didn't give a shit about Jas. So Jas stopped giving a shit about science. He started skipping and not caring and soon the whole year went like that.

Honestly, I don't think Mr. Rubell gave a shit about me either. It's just that I like science and I get it. He would always confuse me with Jas or some other Brown kid; sometimes if I put up my hand to answer a question, he would say, "Yes Jas or Yes, Nav?" He hardly ever remembered my name. Sometimes, if I got a good mark on a test he would be surprised as if I stole that mark. Maybe it was my imagination, but he looked at me strangely like I either cheated or the whole thing was a fluke. It's like I pushed and pulled on something invisible to make it happen; it just wasn't natural for him that I did well. He never gave me a break either; like one time I wanted an extension but he never gave it to me. If an Asian or White student asked for an extension, even if he was getting 50%, Rubell would give it to him. If a Brown student like me asked, he wouldn't get it even if he was getting 85%. It's totally lame. The thing is that he and other teachers totally know that we get it but they still do it anyway.

It's the same for math. The difference is that math I don't get. I've never really got it. I tried doing my best in the beginning of the year but it didn't show and I began to drown. My marks weren't there either. After the first test, my teacher just stopped believing in me. She gave up on me just like all my other math teachers. She just taught to the smart kids—all the Asian kids. That hurt, but I try not to think about it too much. Sometimes, I think it's not about how much you study it's about how much you suck up to the teachers. And Brown guys don't suck up to anyone. That's really how it goes; like I have seen Brown guys who are really smart but teachers don't respect them. They always respect Asian or White kids who suck up to them even if they aren't smart.

As Deyhle (1992), Duncan-Andrade (2005, 2006, 2007), Kincheloe, (2007), Dei (2003), Shields, et al.,(2005), Valencia (1997, 2004), and others have argued,

pathologizing the lived experiences of students occur in myriad ways. Two dominant ways surfaced in this study: Criminalization of the Brown boys' behaviour and deficit thinking. Although both ways were incendiary, humiliating, and injurious according to the testimonials and reflections of the Brown boys interviewed, the deficit way of positioning the Brown boys was perhaps the most hurtful and damaging to the collective psyche of the entire group of Brown boys at Montclair High School. As I will examine below, the educators' lack of belief in the Brown boys' intellectual abilities was perhaps, for the latter, one of the most difficult and hurtful aspects of their entire schooling experience. In the narrative above, Gurjit who argues that his teachers do not think he is very smart because he is Brown also claims that he is hurt by the lack of faith his teachers show him. If Valencia's (1997, 2004) concepts and language were available to him, he would probably use the term deficit thinking to describe what he felt his teachers thought of him and the Brown boys. Before I examine Gurjit's and other students' experiences, let me clarify the term deficit thinking.

Modern day deficit thinking conceptions have grown from the culture of poverty paradigm which evinces that minoritized student failure and disaffection are a result of the students' own inherent deficiencies and lack of ambition (Valencia & Solórzano, 2004). Valencia (1997) explains:

The deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial deficits and dysfunctions. Given the endogenous nature of deficit thinking, systemic factors (for example school segregation, inequalities in school financing, curriculum differentiation) are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school. The popular “at risk” construct, now entwined in educational circles, views poor and working-class children and their families (typically of color) as being predominantly responsible for

school failure, while frequently holding structural inequality blameless (p. xi).

According to Valencia (1997, 2004) the narratives of deficit thinking are so prevalent in schools that they consciously or unconsciously shape teacher practices. Essentially, this deficit way of seeing and doing strategically blames the culture and environment of the home and family for the students' professed educational "deficit" (Valencia, 2004). Instead of widening the circumference of vision to determine possible causes of minoritized student disenfranchisement—which would logically include educational policies and practices—deficit theorists blame students for circumstances that they did not necessarily create. The factors commonly employed in this discourse of blame are, among others, the students': race, class, genetics, culture, language, family, and religion. It is these factors, they argue, that obstruct minoritized students from attaining educational competence. Additionally, deficit theorists argue that these factors are not only fabricated to shift the locus of blame from the school to the student, but they absolve the educational institution from examining critically their own practices that might wittingly or unwittingly contribute to unjust and harmful educational practices.

Gurjit, a young man who has the rare ability to see the multiplicity of circumstance through someone else's eyes believes that many of his teachers at Montclair High School see Brown boys as inferior. He saw Mr. Rubell, the science teacher, paying more attention to the smart kids, who in Gurjit's mind were Asian and White. Even though he felt that he "got" science—he was enchanted by the elegant congruity of chaos within the discipline—he believed that he did not get the credit he deserved. Even when he scored well in the assignments or tests, Mr. Rubell would suspiciously explain away the high mark as opportunistic or a clever and guileful act of cheating. According to Gurjit, Mr.

Rubell saw him and other Brown boys as deficient and lacking in ability and intelligence. Brown boys weren't capable of sophisticated thought and certainly not capable of working hard. Even though Jas, his friend, made a valiant effort in the beginning of the year, in Gurjit's mind, Mr. Rubell did not acknowledge or encourage him; instead he ignored him and expected that Jas would simply fade from his and the class's memory by the end of the year. Jas was not the serious or conscientious type; Mr. Rubell had seen many Jas's over the years and knew that by the end of the year, he belonged to the group of "failures" that became the legacy of the Brown boys at Montclair High School. The Jas's of the world, according to Mr. Rubell, would sometimes make an ardent appeal for a second chance toward the end of the year—perhaps pleading for an opportunity to write the final exam or catching up on all the missed homework—but the intention would be short lived and like always, they would return to their indolent and irresponsible ways. For Gurjit, it was the inevitable expectation of mediocrity and failure attached to Brown boys that he found deeply offensive and unjust. Ultimately, he believed that the Rubells of the school did not believe that the Brown boys could succeed. For Gurjit, White teachers did not believe in them. They saw something in the Brown boys that convinced them that they were not capable of learning. Whether it was the essentialist identity of the violent South Asian male, exacerbated by the hard core gangster type of Brown student's who had attended Montclair High School several years back, Gurjit believed that the teachers saw and treated them all as inferior and lacking. For Gurjit, it was not a big surprise then that teachers refused gracing Brown boys with extensions or assignments or offering tutorials after school to ensure their success; why would they do

this for Brown boys if they thought that they were unmotivated, self-absorbed, and dim-witted?

It is unclear if Gurjit actually believes that “sucking up” to the teachers truly affects the degree of respect that students will receive. Whether it is a conviction born of experience; a snowballing school myth; an assertion made in jest to deflect the painful realization or acceptance that Brown boys are indeed pathologized; or something altogether different, Gurjit’s unequivocal declaration that Brown boys “don’t suck up to anyone” has a striking valency that when read with other testimonials of Gurjit and his “crew” reveal an intriguing narrative of power. As we have seen in previous chapters, this notion of power captures the Brown boys’ fierce belief that it is they who possess the social power of the school. They firmly believe that despite their lack of academic success, the symbolic power of the school rests with them not the teachers, administration, or other student groups. They have the freedom, control, and right to exercise their will on everyone and anyone. If it means violating school rules or suffering the consequences as a result of breaking the rules, so be it. As one Brown boy, who self-disclosed that he is a frequent visitor to the school office, states, “We have about 90% of the power of the school. If you watch around at school, you’ll notice it right away.”

Now that I have foregrounded this theme of deficit thinking, let me examine, systematically, how the Brown boys at Montclair High School are pathologized as intellectually inferior. I begin by recounting how educators, students, and even members of their “own community” position the Brown boys as “dumb.” Second, I recount and explore two reasons for the Brown boys’ lack of academic success as theorized by many of the participants in this study. Lastly, I examine how many of the Brown boys, at

Montclair High School, react and respond to the public denunciations of their lack of abilities and motivation to successfully complete school work. Among the claims, themes, and arguments that I attempt to develop, I continue to reflect on my methodology and, more importantly, endeavour to narratively represent the rich storied lives of my participants.

Labelling of the Brown Boys as “Dumb”

During this year long study, there were many comments, attitudes, and beliefs that interviewees stated explicitly and/or implicitly that surprised me. None, however, compared to the open and straightforward declaration by the educators and non-South Asian students of the Brown boys’ lack of intellectual ambition and abilities. The willingness to openly discuss this deficit perspective publically as though it was an irrefutable fact, revealed at Montclair High School a mindset and culture that for me were eye-opening and for the Brown boys, collectively, were defeating. For this belief to be espoused and voiced so openly cannot be attributed solely to the non-South Asian interviewees; the Brown boys, too, are complicit in contributing to these complex and contradictory processes that have forged the construction of this pathologized identity. In Chapter 11, I will examine further how the Brown boys contribute to their own positioning of this deficit thinking identity. For now, however, let us hear a sample of frank voices of the non-South Asian students at Montclair High School.

The majority of the Brown guys get bad marks. They are the skipping class type of guys, who don’t really care if they fail [their] classes.
(Chad)

They are the ones who represent everything that goes wrong with the school. The stereotype is that “they are all like that.” They are perceived not very smart academically; they don’t really care; they only care about their friends. You can see why teachers treat them

much more stricter [sic]. If they do something, they would be treated much harsher than if we, a group of hijab wearing girls, would. (Imaan)

A lot of them get bad grades, so any kind of teachers help would be good for them. To make them successful, teachers should say: "I am collecting things from you, so you should do this assignment." I don't think a lot of them do any work so if teachers say this, at least they know it will be for marks or that it will count for their letter grade. But really, it doesn't seem that they really care. If they had something to do other than what they do, maybe it would interest them. More activities to keep them occupied. A lot of it also depends on what is going on at home. (Byron)

Chad, Imaan, and Byron are indeed representative of the thought and comments of most of the non-South Asian students I interviewed at Montclair High School. It was not uncommon to hear from these students, unsolicited, disparaging comments about the Brown boys' academic abilities. A motif in most of these comments, which Imaan states explicitly, is that the Brown boys "don't really care" about academics. According to most of these non-South Asian students, the Brown boys' priorities were elsewhere. Working hard, learning, wondering, and scoring well on exams were very low on the Brown boys' priorities. For the Brown boys, other priorities trumped

I must state here, the dialectic of choosing quotes from interview texts and field notes to elucidate the themes I am developing and, in turn, the evolving themes directing the passages I should choose has been both an intuitive and deliberate process. Intuitive because in the process of writing, large excerpts of participants' comments would flash in my mind ready to defend or illuminate precisely the argument I would be attempting to develop. That is, from over a thousand pages of interview texts and field notes, would emerge in my mind's eye, these appropriate narratives or quotes that I would then locate from these pages and eventually sculpt into my dissertation text.

academics. According to these interviewees, socializing with friends, intimidating others around them, and engaging in delinquent behaviours were more appealing than expanding their knowledge about various subjects. Intriguingly, Byron identifies a strategy for teachers that might help more Brown boys succeed; he suggests that if teachers made their expectations explicit, the Brown boys would perhaps complete work specifically evaluated for marks. After a quick insightful foray into the merits of effective pedagogy—which incidentally none of the non-South Asian educators I interviewed wanted to explore—Byron soon reverted back to the disinterested nature of the Brown boys and painted a disturbing picture of Brown boy apathy.

Strikingly for me, even the teachers were blatant in their comments about the Brown boys' academic abilities. Misty shares her thoughts:

There are challenges in that they [Brown boys] are still not

Deliberate because the quotes I would chose were not always the inflammatory or provocative ones that could stir in the reader an emotional reaction. Nor were they narratives that would fit tightly into the thematic categories that I would be trying to advance. When deciding on the suitability of a quote, from which frequently I had dozens of pertinent ones to choose from, I ensured that the quotes or narratives best represented the tensions of all my participants; their relationships, not only with each other and themselves, but the places they were situated in; and the contexts that shaped all of their relevant interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also had to assure that the dissertation text I was writing captured my participants' "storied lives in storied ways [and] not to represent storied lives as exemplars of formal categories" (p. 141). That is, I did not necessarily want to write specifically to the reductionist tendencies of themes by sacrificing the richness and humanity of my participants' storied lives. At

academically inclined as certain groups. I think the stereotype is that the South East Asian boys are more rambunctious, more vocal, and less compliant, which ironically, is everything I love [she laughs]. The perception, however, is if there are things that go wrong in our school it is more than likely to be a South East Asian boy than any other boy that is involved. ... It is known that South East Asian boys are less inclined to be readers and less inclined to push themselves academically. And the school and academics isn't [sic] pushed at home; obviously there is a cultural context there.

Damien shares his thoughts:

When you talk about the Brown guys, you are talking about a particular group of boys. Not all Indo-Canadian boys struggle academically and create difficulties for the school. There are a number of Indo-Canadian boys, *for some reason*, who do quite well. The Brown guys underachieve. They collectively could care less about school.

And George shares his:

We had one year—was it last year or the year before—the top one hundred kids in academics and there was not one Brown guy! Not one. That was in the grade 12 graduating class, which had about 250 kids. Not one. There were lots of girls but not one Brown guy. Also, we had our awards night last year and I take interest in this because I know all the kids and

the same time, I had to be judicious; if I focussed only on the narratives that captured the personal and unique experiences of my participants lives without framing them within the formal and more generalizable categories of themes, my dissertation could be charged with solipsism and further, judged poorly for inadequately fulfilling the criteria of strong research delineated by scholars who lean more toward reductionist methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Needless to say, throughout this entire dissertation writing process, I attempted to “select” quotes and passages, construct narratives, and conduct measured analysis “upward to overarching categories” rather than “downward to ... the reduction of themes” (p. 143). In other words, instead of only advancing the formal categories of themes, which have a tendency to cause “participants [to] fade into supporting roles” (p.143), I attempted to “narratively” (Conle, 2005, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) represent the storied lives of my participants in

we have some brilliant kids, of all the kids that got awards, there was [sic] only four South Asian boys but none out of the four were the so called Brown guys. I counted them. Lots of Asian kids. The reason I counted them was because I knew that was a bit of an issue. There were Brown girls but only four boys.

ways that others—whether they were other Brown boys in and out of Montclair High School, teachers, principals, students, or my readers—could connect with their experiences and humanity.

According to Misty, Damien, and George—who captured well the sentiments of most of their colleagues—the Brown boys at Montclair High School were experiencing academic hardship. None of the three educators positioned these academic challenges as a symptom that could implicate the school. That is, not even once in any of the interviews did any of these three educators question the educational system for its part in the academic challenges that the Brown boys experienced. The academic adversity that the Brown boys were experiencing was of their own making; they were solely responsible for this deficiency. The schools were not at fault. In fact, in all my interviews with non-South Asian educators, not one educator critically challenged the philosophies, practices, and policies of the entire educational system. For that matter, not one educator questioned the efficacy of his or her own teaching practices. For all the educators I interviewed at Montclair High School, the entire educational enterprise, including their own personal interpretation of effective educational praxis, remained sacrosanct and exempt from any form of scrutiny or self-critique. The academic challenges experienced by the Brown boys were not their fault. The blame rested squarely on the shoulders of the Brown boys. For reasons, I will elaborate shortly, the Brown boys were entirely deemed responsible for their own predicament.

Curiously, for Misty, when she describes a few of the Brown boys' attributes—"more rambunctious, more vocal and less compliant"—she realizes that these are qualities that she prefers in students. In her English classes, she appreciates students who challenge her, test her limits, and even defy convention. However, when these attributes are associated with the Brown boys, they seem less appealing to her; for some reason, the behaviours are no longer endearing. She does not elaborate on this irony, but instead shifts the conversation and begins to speak about the Brown boys from a third person point of view: "it is known ..." and "the perception is ..." Misty does not own the statement she makes about the Brown boys being "less inclined to push themselves academically" but frames it as a "known" fact. When sharing his thoughts about Indo-Canadian boys, Damien, the second educator quoted, distinguishes them from the Brown boys whom he refers to as the "Brown guys." In his mind, "'Brown guys' underachieve." "For some reason," some Indo-Canadian boys "do quite well." Damien is clear about the success of some of these Indo-Canadian boys but he does not quite understand why they are successful. For him, their success is a contradiction. Indeed, Damien sees these Indo-Canadian students through a deficit thinking lens, and when some of them succeed, he is pleasantly surprised. George, the third educator quoted, is aware that the low performing trend of the Brown boys is "a bit of an issue" at Montclair High School so he has been vigilant about tracking their successes and failures during graduation and award ceremonies. He conveys to me, with great gravity, that in recent times "not one" Brown boy has been ranked in the list of top one hundred graduates who have received academic recognition. During the awards ceremony last year, only four South Asian boys received awards; however, of those four, not one was a "so called Brown guy" or Brown boy.

Amrit, a South Asian teacher, had altogether a different perspective than her colleagues. She stated that many of her colleagues and the educational institutions themselves are complicit in the disaffection and failure of the Brown boys: “We are failing these kids!” In fact, she was so clear and single-minded about her convictions that she likened the school’s pathologizing and oppressive practices to the outright racism that she and, more so, her father had experienced when they were much younger. I will recount and explore, in the final chapter, the entire excerpt of Amrit’s “we are failing these kids” diatribe. For now, I unpack her link between the racism that she and her father experienced in a small town of Crystal Waters³³ and the Montclair High’s pathologizing practices toward the Brown boys.

There was outright racism in Crystal Waters where I grew up and that was much easier. It is overt; it isn’t this covert stuff that is so hard to deal with. My dad told me that he was in a board meeting back in Crystal Waters and various members were talking about racism and said that “we don’t have this issue.” My dad stood up and said “How the hell do you know? How the hell do you know that we don’t have that issue or not?” Because you don’t see it; if you are not brown or Indian, you just don’t see it. It goes right over your head; your eyes are not open to it.

I remember when I was a kid also in Crystal Waters, I went to a hairdresser who was new to town, and was talking to my dad and asked him: “What do you do?” My dad replied that he worked at the school. If someone asked me about working at the school, I automatically think teacher. But she said, “Oh so you are the janitor.” Why would you think that? Why? It is so unfortunate.

We are almost going back to the times of Snow Bank School³⁴ where my dad graduated. His teacher said, “You aren’t going to graduate, you are going to end up in the mill. You are not good enough to go there [University]. It seems like we are moving back; my own colleagues are

³³ Pseudonym; a small town in Northern British Columbia

³⁴ Pseudonym; a large school in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver

moving back. I see it with my own eyes. I know that life is cyclical but we shouldn't be cycling back to those times.”

For Amrit, the deficit theorizing that the Brown boys are experiencing at Montclair High School is no different than the racism minoritized students experienced in the past; the only exception is that the discourse used now is much more covert, disguised, and insidious. The Othering hasn't changed. The inferiorization of the Other has changed. The Brown boys at Montclair High School, in her estimation, are seen as low performing students unworthy of what society labels “successful.” During her father's time, she proposes, the default way to see a Brown person was inferior or subjugated. Her father worked at a school as a teacher, but the default assumption of her hairdresser who heard that he worked at a school was that he must have been a custodian. Amrit is suggesting that “Brownness” during her father's time was coded as inferior, low achieving, and deficient. When given the opportunity for individuals to infer, at that time, they would attach inferiority and deficient to “Brownness.” Instead of automatically inferring that her father was a teacher, which Amrit thought was a normal deduction when someone is told that a person works in a school, her hairdresser assumed he was a janitor. The hairdresser's way of seeing color was *coloured*. She saw Brown as deficit. Similarly, Amrit is suggesting that teachers—and non-Brown students, who she referred to later on in the interview—at Montclair High see Brown boys as deficit. Brown boys, she posits, conjures up in the minds of teachers images of failure and dysfunction, which then through their pathologizing actions and behaviours, they project back on to the Brown boys, thus continuing the cycle. Coded in their way of seeing Brown boys is pathology.

Unfortunately, the pathologizing of these boys has not been confined to the school itself, but has become reified in the wider community:

We are finding Indo-Canadian parents, where they don't want to send their boys here to this school. They think with the influence of the other Brown guys, their kids will start doing badly. Let me give you an example: we have one absolutely wonderful kid; I won't mention his name, he is in grade 8. He played in the grade 8 rugby team; this is a really interesting guy; he can't catch the ball, he can't run and he doesn't know what to do in the game, but he is such a lovely kid with a lovely heart. What I like about him is that he is a modified student³⁵; his family is really strong; he didn't want any help. He passed social studies 8 by himself. He just worked at it. He passed math 8 by himself and, believe me, that was a challenge for him—but he did it. He didn't accept any help. Dad came to all the meetings. Now, dad was born in India. Even dad understands the neighbourhood and this school, so he is going to send him to Trudeau High³⁶ because there aren't many Brown guys there. I asked why? And the dad mumbled that he didn't want his son to become lazy and do poorly. (Damien)

Well, there was a boy who came to me and told me that “I don't hang out with the Brown boys; remember, this is a South Asian boy who told me that. That really struck me. “I don't hang out with the Brown boys.” He said to me that “you can't hang out with the Brown boys and be thought of as smart, because those Brown boys, they are not going to go anywhere. Everyone knows those Brown boys aren't going anywhere so I hang with the Asian kids. I made that choice.” That was really upsetting for me and a real window for me about how the Brown boys are being viewed and stereotyped. I was more naïve then I first thought I guess. It was good for me to hear that. (Mary)

Interestingly, when sharing with me these examples of the academic challenges that the Brown boys were experiencing at the school, both Damien and Mary, in their individual interviews with me, became silent and serious. Both of them looked at me solemnly as though they were sitting on a large secret. When they began their sentences, “well,” “now,” I read into their words and, more so, their gestures: “wait ‘till you here this!” For

³⁵ A student with a recognized learning disability. Modified student will have an individualized educational plan (IEP), which identifies his/her specific learning expectations and outlines how the school will address these expectations through accommodations, program modifications, and individualized instructional and assessment strategies.

³⁶ Pseudonym for another school in the same school district

both Damien and Mary, the low performance of all the Brown boys took on an altogether different gravitas because, now, from their experiences, students and members from the boys' own South Asian community did not want to associate with them. They believed, there was a recognition and admission from within the "community," that the Brown boys were struggling academically and that if other students—Brown or otherwise—chose to associate with or befriend them, they too would be in danger of picking up either their bad ways or their bad reputation. In Mary's case, a South Asian male student confided in her that if he was going to "be thought of as smart" he "couldn't hang out with the Brown boys." He made this "choice" because his future depended on it. It was understood by everyone in the school, he claimed, that the "Brown boys aren't going anywhere"; hence, in order to secure his identity of an intelligent student with academic potential, he had to disassociate himself from them. According to Mary's account, this South Asian male student decided that he would "hang with Asian kids." At Montclair High, and in fact, all throughout the Rowling school district, "Asian" was a polite moniker for Chinese. Additionally, it was a well known stereotype that Chinese students are studious and academically successful. For this South Asian male student to invoke this phrase "hang with Asians" meant that he was going to work hard and do his utmost to succeed academically.

Damien, after claiming that Indo-Canadian parents do not want to send their sons to Montclair High School provides an example of a South Asian student that he thinks is an "absolutely wonderful kid."

I would go as far as saying that intelligence, at Montclair High School, was racialized. Implicit in the majority of my conversations with the students and many of the South Asian students themselves, was the assumption that Asian or

Although this student “can’t catch ... can’t run ... and doesn’t know what to do in the game” he is on school rugby team and “is a lovely kid with a lovely heart.” Damien is particularly proud of him because, as a modified student, he works hard. Unlike the “Brown guys,” this student works extremely hard, does not “accept any help,” and passes difficult courses by sheer determination. By accentuating this South Asian male student’s learning disability, Damien is implying that anyone willing to work hard in school can succeed. In other words, South Asian male students who do not have learning disabilities—who are better off than this “wonderful modified student”—should be able to do as well if they worked hard. If this South Asian modified student can succeed, any South Asian student willing to work hard should also be able to succeed. Damien closes his point by claiming that the father of this South Asian male student does not want to

Chinese students were smart and Brown students were dumb. Often, the two groups were directly compared using binary logic: “either you’re smart like the Chinese or dumb like the Brown boys.” Or, “not like us, the Asians are really smart.” Whichever way it was framed, Chinese or Asian signified smart or intelligent and Brown or Indo-Canadian signified dumb.

Raj, a Brown boy, shares his thoughts:

Everyone knows, and it is somewhat true, that the Chinese people, they are really smart. We say that they have no life, which is obviously not true because they do. I don’t know; they care about their future and life so much, not that we don’t but maybe we don’t think about it as much as they do. They do 24/7. Probably what their parents tell them and what their parents put them through like tutors and stuff makes them think that it is just expected from them. Unlike us. [silent for a couple of seconds] It’s kind of different for us.

Raj also racializes intelligence. As he explains his point, he suggests that for the Chinese students, their entire pursuit for academic excellence originates from the way they are raised. According to Raj, not only do Chinese parents provide their kids with the necessary

continue sending his son to Montclair High School. Because “he didn’t want his son to become lazy and do poorly,” he is sending him to another school in the school district where “there aren’t many Brown guys” registered. Once again, Damien is capitalizing on the words of “an Indo-Canadian parent,” who is disparaging about one of his own community members, to prove that the Brown boys are experiencing academic difficulties because of their pathological ways.

The Brown Boys Privileged Lifestyle

Many reasons for the Brown boys’ lack of academic success were theorized by my interviewees; among them, two—either one or the other or both—were cited by every educator I interviewed. Further, many of the non-South Asian and South Asian students I interviewed also cited one or both of these reasons. The first most common reason was the “privileged” nature of these boys. The second was the

resources such as tutors, they inculcate the ethic of excellence into the way they see the world: “they care about their future and life so much ... 24 7.” What is particularly striking about Raj’s comments is his choice of words “unlike us,” which implies that his family, in fact the South Asians, are not as disciplined and committed to academic excellence as are the Chinese. Yet again, this theme of academics not featuring prominently in the Brown boys’ culture surfaces, albeit in an implicit manner.

Before I close this point, let me cite Lauren’s thoughts that illuminates my claim that students at Montclair racialize intelligence.

“Last year, I was considered the Chinese White kid because I take all the honours classes and stuff like that, which is classified as the Chinese kids because they are considered the smart ones in the school.”

For Lauren, Chinese students take honours classes. They are the ones who are motivated and have the capabilities to succeed in challenging classes. In her interview with me,

family business that served, for the Brown boys, as a safety net. Let me examine the notion of the boys' privilege by sharing, first, the voices of two educational leaders at Montclair High School, Mary and Jack:

she positioned herself as an honour roll student; someone who "loves to learn and is "motivated to get into a good university, like Harvard." To legitimate her identity of academically gifted, she positioned herself as a "Chinese White kid." White was not a strong enough marker to denote intelligence; hence, she employed the marker of Chinese to strengthen her claim.

I think the South Asian kids are struggling because some of them are caught between two worlds. The girls are particularly struggling with contradictions of expectations between boys and girls and the girls talk about feeling less valued and less trusted. The boys are seen as the ideal gender and are very much privileged from birth. All their needs and more are taken care of—sometimes to the detriment of the girls. The impressions I hear often from the girls is [sic] that their brother or brothers have a silver spoon in their mouths. (Mary)

The girls—and this is one of the more interesting issues—is this whole understanding of the gender differences within the South Asian community. Whether it is true or my perception but with talking to many members of the South Asian girls is that they feel very undervalued as human beings. They feel that their siblings who are brothers have it quite a bit easier; they have much more freedom to be who they are. They are handed everything, whereas the girls have to earn it. The guys have it easy and as a result expect things to come to them easily. As you can expect, but I don't think they [South Asian male students] realize it but things normally don't come that easy for people in school; they have to work for it. When it doesn't come, they can't handle it. (Jack)

The storyline behind this reason of the Brown boys' privilege is quite clear: From birth, they are coddled, with every need or whim of theirs addressed dotingly. The boys' female siblings, on the other hand, are not reared with the same kind of favour and entitlement and hence, feel, among other things, resentful and "undervalued." Because

the girls in these South Asian families have to labour or toil for everything—including “love” and “respect,” as some South Asian girls in interviews have revealed to me—they cultivate, along the way, a stronger work ethic and keener desire to succeed. The female siblings do not expect a “smooth ride”; they realize very early in their lives that they have to re-double their efforts to succeed. The boys, however, “are handed everything” and “expect things to come to them easily.” As a result, according to these two administrators who were representative of the majority of the staff at Montclair High School, the Brown boys did not cultivate, along the way, a strong work ethic and keen desire to succeed. Instead, they expected life, especially during hardships, to continue gifting them with privileges.

Let me invite two more voices. Amneet, a South Asian female student and Mandeep, the cultural worker, both at Montclair High School share, forthrightly, their thoughts:

I think what it is with the Brown guys is that they get discouraged easier. They have it easy; they get everything and their moms do everything and stuff and so when they do get bad or low marks they get like, oh, I am doing so bad; and instead of trying harder, they just give up. They don't try to push out of it because they don't want to do anything hard; they aren't used to it. They are just used to getting it easy. (Amneet)

I say, that many South Asian families here in [Rowling], even though they have been here for a long time, are sitting in time capsules. The difference in the way that many treat their sons and daughters is disturbing and upsetting to me. For girls they feel very resentful because they see sibling difference. “Why is my brother treated more special than me even if I am a younger sister?” “Why do I have to bring water?” “Why do I have to cook and clean for him?”

... I see all the time, hardworking parents busy catering to their boys'—and sometimes girls' but not often—materialistic needs. They [boys] all have toys like computers, TVs, cell phones, ipod, cars, all the material things you can think of, they are showered with them at a

very early age. ... So I will ask them [Brown boys], why didn't you come to school yesterday. One would say to me, "Oh, I went for my road test to get my licence." I would say, "You missed school for that? Ok, so when are you are going to get a car?" "Oh, no, the car is waiting for me in the garage for the last one and half years." A forty thousand dollar car is sitting in the garage for the kid to use.

... Their mom's are their nannies; if you have a dirty shirt, mom will clean it. "Why should I lift a hand?" they say. I ask these high school boys all the time, "So what do you do to contribute at home? They say, "Nothing. I would need to get something back." No wonder they are not prepared for life. Simple example: in my office one day, I was having a heart-to-heart with one of these boys and I knew he was hungry so I offered him a piece of toast. I keep some supplies because so many of my students, especially the girls, don't have breakfast and they are starved especially when I have meetings with them in the mornings. Anyway, I remember, I told him to butter his toast, and his hand was shaking. He didn't know how to butter his toast. He didn't ask for help either, he thought I would do it. I didn't, I left it for him to do but he didn't do it, he just left the piece of toast. He would rather not eat than to do it or ask for help. You see, he didn't eat. [shakes her head] You see now from this, why would they [Brown boys] ask for help in school?

... the teachers still don't get it. I keep having to tell them that these boys are not going to ask for help. They would rather fail than ask for help. We have to teach them to ask for help not just expect them to know because they don't know. Whatever the reason, we have to teach them it's ok to ask. But the more they fail the more they won't ask [for help] and the more they will continue to be broken inside. But they won't show the world. [Instead], they will show that they don't care. (Mandeep)

As with the tome of interview text I have amassed in this study, there are, in the above two passages, so many narrative threads that I could examine. To ensure I remain coherent with the theme of the Brown boys' privilege, however, I will winnow from the text above and comment on, only the thoughts that will illuminate and advance this theme. Unlike most places in this dissertation where I have had to whittle down large interview text to bite size quotes, or construct from these texts, narratives to best convey the pith of the theme I am developing, here—and in other strategic places in this

dissertation—I include Mandeep’s lengthy passage above because her *happening-truth* (O’Brien cited in Coulter et al., 2007) is more instructive and poignant than any *story-truth*, I can construct. Both Amneet and Mandeep, in their own ways, convey, penetratingly, their reasons for why the Brown boys are struggling academically.

Mandeep is direct; she is convinced that the “toys” indiscriminately gifted to the boys by their parents leave the boys feeling entitled rather than appreciative. From her experience as a cultural worker and insider, she believes that these boys come to expect all the latest gadgets such as ipods, cell phones, and computers, without working for or earning them. She claims that the expectations of these boys do not remain only at the new fangled technological devices, which have a short shelf life, but also include high ticket items such as home theater systems and even new cars and trucks. She suggests that these expectations are a natural continuum of the unconditional entitlements that these boys have been receiving since they were born. Unlike their female siblings, these boys are reared to feel entitled, and to a certain extent, “owed” privileges simply because they are male.

Both Mandeep and Amneet do not stop here; they speculate that one of the main reasons that the Brown boys are disaffected and struggle academically is because of their sense of entitlement. They theorize that the coddled and pampered lifestyles of these Brown boys are shielding them from life’s expected challenges and disappointments, which they believe are necessary for a “good and worthwhile life” (Coulter and Wiens, 2008; p. 12). Sheltered from the predictable travails of life that many writers and poets (Frankl, 1984; Gibran, 1992; Krishnamurti, 1975; Peck, 1978; Rumi, 1982; Tournier, 1957; Williamson, 1993) claim are necessary for people to forge their personal mettle,

the Brown boys, according to Mandeep, Amneet, and many other educators in the school, are ill-prepared for life's hardships. That is, the Brown boys have not developed the necessary intestinal fortitude and life skills to capably respond to the vicissitudes of life. They lack the resilience required to overcome life's obstacles and, as Amneet describes, "instead of trying harder, they just give up."

As Mandeep recounts an experience she had with a Brown boy unable to butter a piece of toast, she likens his perceived helplessness, apathy, or arrogance to the schooling experiences of other Brown boys. She speculates that it is these same impulses of helplessness, apathy, or arrogance—individually or collectively—that influence their academic performance and disaffection at school. In other words, Mandeep is suggesting that the entitled way in which these boys are raised shapes their responses to challenges or difficulties they experience in school. She is directly connecting the boys' privileged lifestyle or sense of entitlement with their apathetic, helpless, or arrogant way of handling predicaments. Even though these boys require help in school, according to Mandeep, they will not ask for it. Whether or not it is their feelings of helplessness, apathy, or arrogance or a combination of them all, "they would rather fail than to ask for help." In Mandeep's example, the student in her office was willing to remain hungry rather than ask for help buttering his toast. "He didn't eat ... he would rather not eat than do it [butter his toast] or ask for help." Similarly, she explains, the Brown boys would rather experience the consequences of frustration and failure than to admit they are in need of help or support.

Mandeep claims that she repeatedly cautions the teachers at her school to teach the Brown boys how "to ask for help not just expect them to know." I must acknowledge briefly that buried in one of her sentences above is a hidden jewel: "*whatever the reason*

we have to teach them it's ok to ask [for help]." Mandeep claims that whether or not an educator likes or dislikes, accepts or rejects, appreciates or criticizes the "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992), culture, *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) or whatever one wants to label the background context students bring into the classroom, the educator has a responsibility to do her utmost to ensure that her students succeed. If this means that an educator has to teach students *how* to ask for help, so be it. Once students are in a classroom, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a safe and caring environment for her students, despite the "baggage," dispositions, attitudes, and values the students bring with them. As with Mandeep, I am not naively suggesting that we should "like" our students unconditionally or accept their "baggage," dispositions, attitudes, and values that they bring with them to our classrooms. No, instead, I am stating that even though some of our students may demonstrate attitudes or dispositions of entitlement, arrogance, apathy, or helplessness that we as educators might find irritating or even loathsome, we must, nonetheless, be willing to help them "flourish" (Brighouse, 2008) in our classrooms. We must not throw up our hands in resignation and claim that because of our students' culture or *habitus* we cannot help them succeed in school. As I mentioned, this point will get its due innings in the last chapter of this dissertation.

South Asian students and teachers were not the only participants who theorized that the Brown boys lacked the necessary resilience to overcome academic challenges at school. Three other non-South Asian educators, whom I interviewed, also discussed with me this possibility. Damien, one of the three, captures their sentiments well but with much more frankness:

I get the impression that Indo-Canadian girls want a change in their life cause it is not equitable in their family. Now, the Brown guys are

on a pedestal but the girls do what they are told. They work harder; the boys don't have to, they're soft. They [Brown guys] don't have to work for much and as a result don't develop much of a work ethic. Now if you apply this to school, it's easy to see that this kind of work ethic is not going to serve them well. All your needs are not going to be catered for. That's why you see the Indo-Canadian girls do better academically than the boys. They [Indo-Canadian girls] have learned how to slog it out whereas the boys just expect it to be handed to them on a silver platter. (Damien)

Damien calls the Brown boys "soft." He, like the other educators I have already cited, is suggesting the boys, unlike their female siblings, have a privileged lifestyle; their families do not expect too much from them. He posits that because "they don't have to work for much ... [they] don't develop much of a work ethic." In schools, therefore, the boys struggle when faced with any type of adversity. Whereas the Brown girls "have learned to slog it out," the Brown boys have not cultivated the resilience or "work ethic" to persevere during difficult times. Because of their entitled lifestyle, Damien concludes, in school "the boys just expect [success or help] to be handed to them on a silver platter."

Family Business Safety Net

The other reason for the Brown boys' lack of academic success theorized by almost every educator I interviewed was the "safety net" provided by the family business. Mary, an educational leader, and Callum, a social studies teacher at Montclair High School share their views:

I am sure you have heard this before. "Oh, I know what I will be doing: I will be driving a dump truck because dad owns this and that." Some of these kids [Brown boys] have done so little in school that they are just counting time and then before they realize it, school is over and they haven't done anything meaningful. (Callum)

If there is a group of South Asian boys, or Brown boys, sitting in a classroom, there is an assumption that they are not going to learn or they won't pay any attention and that they will probably need to be separated or brought into line. Maybe true, maybe not. There is

obviously an assumption there. Here goes, [takes a deep breath] here's an assumption on my part: for a number of the Brown boys, I feel they are not going to follow through on their homework; that they are not going to do that well in their classes; [and] that they will come up with stories to avoid work. It's like the given assumption around here that the Asian kid is going to do his homework and that he will end up going to university. However, if you are a Brown boy, you're not [going to university], you are going to end up working in dad's trucking business or something like that. (Mary)

Joining the family business—which, in this study was *always* characterized as a labourer's business—was for my interviewees a compelling reason attributed to the Brown boys' lack of motivation and success in school. Almost invariably, this notion of joining the family business was shared with me by my interviewees as a fact rather than a hypothesis or theory. Very rarely were any of my interviewees critical or self-reflexive, indicating to me that their thoughts were definitive and not speculative. The idea they tried to convey was simple: The Brown boys did not have to worry about working hard or succeeding in school because they knew, very well, that they would always have a job, and thus an income, in their dad's or family's business. In other words, according to Mary, Callum, and other educators and students interviewed, the Brown boys lacked motivation to do well in school because, immediately after grade twelve, they saw themselves working in and eventually taking over their family businesses. Throughout their childhood, these boys received whatever they wanted; material goods and money, as the boys saw it, came easy to them. The family business was the source of it; for the boys, the business would continue satisfying all their needs. According to the Brown boys, the privilege that they had experienced since they were born would only continue once they joined the family business. In the meantime, school had to be endured as painlessly as possible.

Mary makes explicit the pathologizing tendencies held by many of her staff members. She states that when many of her colleagues see a group of Brown boys sitting in a classroom, they will automatically assume that “they are not going to learn or they won’t pay any attention and they will probably need to be separated or brought into line.” After taking a deep breath, she, too, admits that she holds similar prejudices: “I feel they are not going to follow through on their homework; that they are not going to do that well in their classes; [and] that they will come up with stories to avoid work.” Although Mary, later on in the interview, labels her feelings toward the Brown boys as “failings,” her feelings must come from somewhere. She does not manufacture them in a vacuum. What role, then, do the Brown boys play in Mary’s pathologizing view of them? In the next chapter, I will examine this precise question; for now I

What was particularly striking about Mary’s comments was that she is as close to a transformative leader at Montclair High School as I could describe. As I will expand in Chapter 10, her educational leadership philosophy, in different words, embraces the tenets of social betterment, enhancing equity, and moving from critical reflection to enlightened action to redress structural inequities for all students (Shields, 2009). She is a kind, compassionate, and caring leader who believes in engaging with her students dialogically instead of hierarchically. Yet, she admitted to me and herself that she pathologizes the academic abilities of the Brown boys. As much as she fought against these pathologizing impulses, she claimed that she “feels” and “sees” them in this way. Once again, borrowing from the postmodern and post positivist realist theories of identity, we can see that identities are complex, contradictory, and antagonistic (Hall, 1997a, 1997b, 2000), where an individual can possess two ostensibly contradictory values

must acknowledge that the pathologizing discourses and practices of the Brown boys by many of the educators, educational leaders and students at Montclair High School—however unconscionable—have still many complex and unexplored layers. In other words, this part of the story is still incomplete.

Let me now return to the reason of family business, cited by many of the educators at Montclair High School, as one reason that the Brown boys are unmotivated to work hard and succeed academically. Amrit, in an interview excerpt I recount below, captures well the anguish and ambivalence she and her South Asian colleagues feel about this dynamic of the family business.

Amrit: From my experience, I think the boys are babied a lot in our culture; they are taken care of and they don't understand how to take care of themselves and they don't see a need for it. They don't understand that their actions have repercussions; they just think that mom and dad will wipe it all clean. "Oh well," the Brown boys think, "we will simply drive our dads' truck

and justify the existence of both. Indeed, Mary is not proud of harboring these pathologizing impulses toward the Brown boys; however, she is self-reflexive enough—an important characteristic in transformative leadership—to identify them and, more so, to admit to me that she feels this way.

As I stated from the outset, my focus in this dissertation is not to examine identities through a psychological lens; by speculating or further examining Mary's contradictory feelings, I would be venturing in that territory. Nevertheless, I must state that more research is required in this area of educational leadership to better understand how transformative leaders (Shields, 2009) steward students, teachers, and parents through the sometimes labyrinthine pathways of educational policies and programmes all the while harboring pathologizing feels toward many of their minoritized stakeholders. For Mary, when she admitted her feelings to me, she was clearly regretful but she shared her "failings," as she

and make a lot of money.” You don’t know how often I hear this. The other day, a Brown student says to me, “I don’t have to pass this course—my dad is going to buy me a truck; I am going to run the business.” You know, you can sit down with them, but Anish, you are just one person.

later labeled them, with the intent that I may be able to offer her insights that would allow her to better understand and perhaps even overcome these contradictory feelings.

It’s a hard conversation to have with a kid; they simply turn off. It’s particularly hard because they have had these conversations over and over with people who think all their ways are ok. People like, other community members, friends, (and) uncles. These same boys, then, sit down with me and in their minds they think they are going to be successful so why am I talking to them about passing an English essay? Overall, they think they are going to be taken care of and that is their choice so why put in the effort in school?

Anish: To me this speaks to motivation. Are you asking how these boys can have motivation for school when their destination is paved?

Amrit: Yes. They don’t understand the bigger picture and we can’t expect them to either; however, when their parents are saying to them that they will buy them a truck, the boys say to me: “I will drive a truck.” So, instantaneously their futures are set.

Anish: Why are parents buying the boys a truck? Is it for reasons of motivation—do this and I will buy you a truck or is it unconditional?

Amrit: It’s both. There are complex reasons for both. It isn’t that simple. The parents are thinking that the kid isn’t doing well in school so he is going to need something to secure his future and they say, “Since I am doing well, he, too, will be ok—so let me buy him a truck.” They [parents] say: “You are going to drive a truck.” They don’t realize that they are turning their kids off of school and succeeding in school. It is a kind of a vicious circle—they are not doing well because the parents are giving them this kind of security because they think their kids are going to do well with this type of motivation. A whole different arena is the kids who are doing well and whose parents give them a car—how do I say it—you know the parents will be driving a beat up old car but will buy their son a brand new truck. The parents think that is the thing to do. The son, as soon as he gets it, wants to drive around fast, show it off, and race. They enter into a whole different lifestyle—kind of like the whole history of the drug dealers who have gone through this school.

In her first two sentences, Amrit shows the link between the Brown boys’ privilege

Amrit is torn about sharing this information with me. She wants to explain to me that there

and the family business safety net—two of the most referenced reasons for the Brown boys’ low academic performance—that up until now I have examined separately. She posits that because the Brown boys are “babied,” “they don’t understand how to take care of themselves.” They become “soft,” in Damien’s words. Some of these Brown boys, she claims as a teacher and insider, do not have the motivation to do well in school because they understand, too well, that a job at their fathers’ business awaits them. Other Brown boys, who experience academic challenges, she continues, do not possess the mettle to overcome them because of their privileged upbringing.

are some reasons for the Brown boys’ poor academic performance that originate from their “cultural” or family practices—which she considers highly problematic—but she is deeply worried that by sharing this disparaging information, she will provide “more ammunition” to her colleagues and other educators to continue pathologizing the Brown boys and demeaning the South Asian community. In other words, she does not want her disclosure of, what she states are “some negative aspects of our culture” to legitimize the pathologizing practices of her colleagues, which she believes to be “rampant” at her school.

At some point in their schooling these struggling Brown boys decide that academic success is not important, or for that matter, not even necessary because “we will simply drive our dads’ truck and make a lot of money.” These boys, Amrit contends, “don’t understand the bigger picture” and dismiss their teachers’ numerous attempts to educate them about the necessity and long term advantages of education. “Why am I talking to them about passing an English essay,” she says of the Brown boys, when their “friends

(and) uncles ... think their ways are ok.” She is frustrated because her voice exhorting the merits of school is drowned out by the voices of the boys’ family members and friends who, according to Amrit, are denigrating academics and exalting the family business.

Further, Amrit claims that these boys’ parents unwittingly pave their sons’ future. Well meaning in their intent, these Brown boys’ parents, after hearing that their sons are struggling in school, try to encourage them by defending or securing their future; Amrit shares the logic of the parents “since I am doing well, he, too, will be ok—so let me buy him a truck.” From here a “vicious circle” ensues: The parents think that by safeguarding their sons’ future they are providing their sons with the requisite peace of mind and stress-free environment to better focus on their studies. The boys, according to Amrit, interpret their parents’ offer of a safety net as an excuse to renege on their responsibilities at school. The continued poor performance of the boys at school impels the parents to provide more incentives, which in turn, the boys interpret as positive reinforcement and another pardon for their failures. And so the cycle continues.

Amrit submits that even parents who gift their sons with expensive items for achieving success at school are unintentionally enticing them to “enter into a whole different lifestyle”—one that resembles “the drug dealers who have gone through this school.” Amrit, while possibly engaging in slippery slope pseudo-reasoning to make her point, claims she has seen, too often, the Brown boys abuse the generous spirit of their parents. Even though “the parents will be driving a beat up old car ... [they] will buy their son a brand new truck.” For Amrit, this kind of prioritizing and child rearing practices sends the wrong message to an already vulnerable group of Brown boys. She claims, later on in the interview that among other things, “materialism and academics” must be

separated from child rearing practices for these Brown boys to succeed in school. Even though “the parents think that [gifted and privileging their sons] is the thing to do ... they don’t realize that they are turning their kids off of school and succeeding in school.”

Most of the South Asian female students I interviewed also discussed this issue of family business as a main reason for the boys’ poor performance at school. Although the points they raised were similar to the ones that I have already examined, the *way* they spoke about the issue was revealing. Sharda and Chetna share their thoughts:

Don’t parents see that [boys receiving poor marks]? Don’t parents want the best for their sons? So why cut them so much slack? My parents don’t cut me slack like they do my brother. I can’t get away with anything. It’s like, if I get a B, they are like, why didn’t you get an A? But if my brother gets a C-, they are like, wow, you’re passing! Great, can’t wait ‘till you come work with me! What’s up with that?! (Sharda)

Some of them are actually smart and will try and others will do whatever—and be a taxi driver or truck driver in their dad’s business. What can they do if their marks are so bad? Not like us who can’t afford to have bad marks. The boys know that they can get away with it, so why even try? They just have to say, “I will work for my family, in the car dealership, or running a store.” (Chetna)

Not surprisingly, both Sharda and Chetna were both disheartened and appalled by the way they, and more generally girls, were treated in their families. Boys were blatantly favoured by their parents. The girls, according to Chetna, Sharda and others, were not provided with the “slack” the boys so readily received. The girls questioned why they did not receive the same privileges and accolades that the boys received, many times even for accomplishing less than half of what the girls had accomplished. This preferential treatment toward the boys was disturbing to the girls, especially because, according to them, they outperformed the boys in almost every category. Instead of encouraging and

reinforcing the girls for their accomplishments, it was the boys that received from their parents the gifts, praise, and job offers to the family business.

Let me pause and reflect on some of the themes that I have identified, but more so, on a few narrative threads that are pointing to one very important question that must be made explicit. It seems that the data are showing that the privileged lifestyle and the safety net of the family business are two major contributing factors to the Brown boys' lack of academic success. Even Montclair High School educators and students, who are insiders, are attesting to this assertion. The question that must be asked, then, is why would I claim that the Brown boys at Montclair High School are pathologized as intellectually inferior? If much of the data are pointing to the boys' culture and family practices as the source of their academic difficulties why then would I posit that educators and students at their school are engaging in deficit thinking discourses and practices? To frame my response, let me revisit some of the leading scholars who have, to date, shaped this discourse of deficit thinking. Valencia (1997), once again, states:

The deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familial deficits and dysfunctions. (p.xi)

Valencia (1997) states that by solely focusing on the minoritized students' "family deficits and dysfunctions" to justify student failures is precisely what defines the deficit thinking paradigm. In other words, by blaming the minoritized students' socio-cultural background for the academic challenges that they are experiencing at school, deficit thinking theorizers shift the source of the problem entirely onto the students. Instead of problem solving and searching for solutions as all responsible educators, in institutions

worthy of calling themselves educational, should, they isolate the blame onto the minoritized students' "alleged internal deficiencies." As Shields et al.,(2005) explain concisely:

Pathologizing the lived experiences of children becomes a process of treating differences (for example, achievement levels, abilities, ethnic origin, and knowledge perspectives) as deficits that locate the responsibility in the lived experiences of children (home life, socioeconomic status) rather than locating responsibility within classroom interactions and relationships, or indeed, within the education system itself (p. xx)

I must state, once again, that in my interviews with all the non-South Asian educators at Montclair High School, not one of them critically challenged the philosophies, practices, and policies of the school or the educational system. In fact, not one educator questioned the efficacy of his or her own teaching practices. According to them, the academic challenges experienced by the Brown boys were not the fault of the institution or the educators. The blame rested squarely on the shoulders of the Brown boys and their socio-cultural background. For them, the Brown boys were entirely responsible for their own predicament. Clearly, the data show that some of the socio-cultural factors—specifically the privileged treatment of the male children and the unconditional safety net provided for all the male children to enter into the family business—that influence the lives of many of the Brown boys do contribute to the academic challenges they are experiencing at school. Although further investigation is required to determine the depth and breadth of this influence, this study recognizes that, to some degree, these socio-cultural factors are negatively influencing the schooling experiences of the Brown boys at Montclair High School. However to assign entirely this burden onto the Brown boys and their families is inappropriate and unjust. As I will

explain in the last chapter, all the stakeholders charged with the education of the Brown boys—including their parents, families, and themselves—must collectively devise thoughtful strategies to ensure the success of these students.

Misty articulates in words precisely the sentiments that most of the Brown boys whom I interviewed, were trying so desperately to convey to me.

I know that it is a generalization but it is part of the generalization that some teachers come down hard on the South East Asian guys because of their behaviour but in their community, if you are a boy, then you walk on water. Whether that is true or not, that is the perception of the staff. Therefore, you [Brown boys] are not going to take any responsibilities for your action so I [teacher] am going to make you take responsibility. So for the staff they may say: "I am going to look more closely and come down on you harder than on someone else because of this fact. In my subject area, I am not going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

Whether the emotions impelling their words originated from anger, resentment, hurt, betrayal, or other feelings, the Brown boys, as I have already examined, repeatedly recounted that their teachers were particularly harsh, or as Jas described, "always went overboard" when disciplining them. Misty captures well the incongruous and unfair actions and behaviours that an educator can engage in as a result of deficit thinking. That is, Misty illustrates that viewing students through a deficit lens does not only reside at the attitudinal or belief level but sometimes can translate into disproportionate and unjust behaviours. People, as we know, consciously and/or subconsciously act on their beliefs. Believing that a particular group of our students are deficient can undoubtedly influence or shape how we interact with them. Misty claims that her colleagues are "harder" on the Brown boys than they are with other students. Because the Brown boys are privileged—"if you are a boy, then you walk on water"—and because they do not "take any responsibilities for [their] actions," she claims that her colleagues overcompensate and

exact consequences on the Brown boys that may not be commensurate with their actions. Misty implies that many in her staff believe that although they cannot control the privileged lifestyle the Brown boys are favoured with at home, in their jurisdiction—“in my subject area”—they will not grant these students the same privileges. In fact, “I’m going to look *more* closely ... and *not* give you the benefit of the doubt.” Her colleagues, she professes, are even sterner with the Brown boys than other students for attitudes or behaviours that require criticism or censure.

Brown Boys’ Perspective

From all the data I have presented thus far, it is not surprising to state that all of the Brown boys I interviewed complained they were treated by their teachers as though they were dumb, lazy, and uninterested in school work. A sample of their voices captures the tenor of their protest:

When they [teachers] know that a Brown guy is a Brown boy they don’t really put too much effort but if they believe like a White guy or a Chinese guy has potential, they’ll go out of their way to encourage them [sic]. They may try to boost their confidence and say, “you should put a little effort into it.” But for a Brown boy, it’s always like, “nah, he ain’t gonna to do anything anyway.” (Darvesh)

Everyone knows that some teachers play favourites and stuff but you will never see a Brown student be a favourite for a teacher but you’ll see a Brown student be seen as a bad student. (Balbir)

In science class there was a relatively smart boy and the teacher would give him extension if he needed it; but for Brown boys, you can ask and ask and you wouldn’t get an extension. It’s cause they don’t think you are smart or trying so why give you an extension. (Sadhu)

I must underline that I heard from five other students the same sentiment but in different words that Balbir conveyed to me: “you will never see a Brown student be a favourite for a teacher.” Buried in this sentiment was a type of lament, hurt, or sorrow. When I

heard these comments, I was struck more by how the students conveyed the words than the actual words themselves. It was not until later on in the conversation, when they spoke more about academics, grades, or homework that I realized that many of these students were hiding a deep hurt or wound about being positioned as academically inferior. Although in public, as I have already discussed, these boys presented a cavalier and bravado image, many of them carried inside them feelings of pain from demeaning and hurtful comments made by past and present teachers.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the educators' lack of belief in the Brown boys' intellectual abilities was an extremely hurtful aspect of their entire schooling experience. When a few of these students—whom I had established a trusting relationship with—spoke about how they were positioned as low performing, they were overcome by emotions. It was clear to me that for these Brown boys whom I interviewed this deficit view of their intellectual abilities had adversely affected how they saw themselves as Montclair High School students. Balbir and Jeevan reveal in their comments below some of this injury and pain

Sometimes when you try to express yourself there are some teachers who *don't have that belief in you* ... they don't think you can go that far. You know, *that totally brings you down*; it totally brings down your momentum. You've probably heard, like, Brown guys don't participate a lot; they just sit around and that's how the teachers look at them. You know, [raises his voice in disgust] if the teachers look at you like that, expect that from you, [then] that's how you'll turn out to be... Cause, like I try and I try to be my best but like sometimes it doesn't work, for whatever reason, it doesn't work and the teachers don't believe in me and think that I don't care so I just completely give up on them and their classes [tears well up in Balbir's eyes]. (Balbir)

You [teachers] shouldn't be saying negative stuff like that. Like one of my crew was having a tough time in school and at that time I don't think his parents understood that he was having a difficult time at home too. But he would go to school and [the teachers would say]

“you’re failing this and you’re not good at that.” You know, that made him feel really low; he was totally bummed out so he just quit school. (Jeevan)

Jeevan recounts of a time when “his friend” was experiencing difficult times both at home and in school. A couple of weeks later, in an informal conversation near the student parking lot, he admitted to me that he was really speaking about himself. During those challenging times, he believed no one—not even his crew—understood his “issues.” Despite these adverse times, he made an effort to continue attending school. He believed, if anything, school could be a respite from the challenges he was experiencing at home. He was wrong. It proved to be the opposite. Jeevan claims that all he heard, when at school, were disparaging comments about his academic abilities and study habits. Unable to cope, he quit school. After a six month hiatus, he “felt better about his life,” which he disclosed to me during the informal conversation and “wanted to give

In the midst of listening to so many Brown boys complain about how very few teachers had faith in their abilities, I heard from one Brown boy a different story. It was a small story of a marriage between magnanimity of heart and teaching.

In our electricity unit in science a few years ago, Mr. Wellman taught our class how to correctly wire a plug. Before he demonstrated, step-by-step, what it took to attach a wire to a new plug, he said that this was an important skill to learn because far too many people, these days, were throwing out perfectly good appliances not understanding that the appliance had stopped working because of a faulty connection between the wire and the plug. Given that most people do not know the proper way of unplugging an appliance—not to unplug by tugging the wire but actually holding onto the plug and then pulling it—the likelihood of using this new skill was quite high. So he began. We

it [school] another shot.” He claims that even now, his teachers are just as discouraging but he is in a better frame of mind to cope with such negative comments.

Balbir is emotional when he shares with me his teachers’ lack of belief in him. He claims that despite trying his best, “for whatever reason,” he has a very difficult time succeeding in school. Instead of his teachers encouraging or helping him, “the teachers don’t believe in me and think that I don’t care.” Based on his private logic, he infers that since the teachers “don’t have that belief in you,” it “totally brings you down.” He implies that for him to even have a chance at succeeding in school, his teachers have to have faith in his abilities. He admits that, “for whatever reason,” he experiences challenges with his school work. Balbir knows that academics do not come easy for him. For this and other reasons, he relies on the belief and encouragement of his teachers. From his

all watched. He looked at each of us and smiled as he weaved the two wires around the two screws of the open plug. His fingers did not need his eyes to guide them. He said it was now our turn. I panicked. I did not know then, but in order to learn a new skill, I needed someone to work with me hand-over-hand. When dad and I worked on our deck we eventually built, the first time I was allowed to use the radial arm saw, dad steadied my hand as I kept the blade close to the line I was cutting.

Andrew, next to me, had finished and was about to hand his plug in to Mr. Wellman. Kas was listening to his ipod with Jas; both of them were the first ones to finish. All I had done was write my name on a small rip of masking tape. I looked at Mr. Wellman’s perfect demo plug; it was lying on Stephanie’s desk beckoning me. When Mr. Wellman wanted to demonstrate something he would always choose an empty desk at the back of the room or the desk of someone who was absent. He would, then, ask

experiences, however, his teachers don't believe in him and expect that he, like all the other Brown boys, care less about learning. He also makes explicit that he is aware, "most Brown boys don't participate a lot [in class]"; however, for his teachers to automatically conclude that they do not care about learning is, for him, unjust and unfair. He ardently believes that as long as teachers continue to see or position Brown boys as academically unmotivated, the boys will continue to wilt and only minimally meet those low expectations.

In the next chapter, I examine how many of the attitudes, beliefs, decisions, and practices of the school leadership, and by corollary the school, contributed to the pathologizing of the Brown boys and to a certain extent their communities.

everyone to crowd around him. Shoulder to shoulder, we watched the magician dazzle us with his latest incantation. Stephanie that day was absent and it was her desk that became the stage. Without thinking, I grabbed Mr. Wellman's demo plug and in one motion, stuck my piece of tape on it and placed it in a basket that proudly displayed all the other completed plugs for Mr. Wellman to mark.

The next day Mr. Wellman discreetly asked me to come to his class afterschool. I knew he knew. He politely asked me to sit at Stephanie's desk and there he showed me, step-by-step, how to wire a plug. He looked at me and smiled as he weaved the two wires around the two screws. Once he finished his demonstration, he asked me to try. He watched intently. He steadied my hand as I weaved the wire around the first screw. When I finished, Mr. Wellman looked directly in my eyes and said: "I know you can do this; go over to your desk and try with this new plug." I confidently completed my task and handed it to him, which he marked on

the spot. I knew he knew but not once that afternoon, in his class, did Mr. Wellman even hint to me that he knew. I tried hard not to know how he knew.

Months later, however, when at home, I unplugged—unthinkingly, by tugging on the wire—our brand new white kettle. I realized then that all the students' plugs that we had to wire were black and only Mr. Wellman's demo plug was white.

10. PATHOLOGIZING PRACTICES EMBEDDED IN THE SCHOOL CULTURE

The voices of the three South Asian teachers, along with the nine non-South Asian educators, have featured prominently in this study. I have examined the perspectives of all twelve educators on, among other aspects, how they understood the schooling experiences of the disaffected South Asian males and how they related to these South Asian students. As the narratives and analysis of the themes from the data have expounded, the South Asian teachers have been just as, if not more than the Brown boys themselves, vociferous about the pathologizing discourses and practices of their colleagues. As we have seen in many circumstances, they have defended or advocated for the Brown boys claiming that too many of their colleagues use a deficit lens when viewing the behaviours, competencies, and values of the Brown boys. In other circumstances, however, they have been particularly critical of the Brown boys, accusing them of shirking their responsibilities and hiding behind their privileged upbringing. Not all the stories that arose in my long and intense interviews with these three South Asian teachers directly, however, related to the schooling experiences of the Brown boys. They shared with me stories that elucidated the prevailing *habitus*—the relationships, attitudes, practices, leadership, and culture—of the school, which at times explained why the educators behaved or acted in a pathologizing manner toward the Brown boys. That is, according to the South Asian teachers, the leadership at the school and the school district and many of their school colleagues very rarely, if ever, recognized, legitimated, or even dignified the place of South Asian cultures in the lives of the South Asian students in the school. Even though over one third of the school population self-identified as South Asian and, as I examined in Chapter 4, over fifty percent of the entire South Asian

population of Rowling live in the catchment area and adjacent catchment area of Montclair High School, the majority of the staff and leadership at the school, in general, not only insulated themselves from the South Asian communities, but, according to the South Asian teachers and two non-South Asian teachers interviewed, many of them inferiorized and even pathologized the cultural capital that these communities offered. It is these stories and storylines that I focus on in this chapter.

First, I examine Preeti, a South Asian teacher's claim that the staff and administration at Montclair High School do not value or support events organized by South Asian students for the South Asian communities. Second, I explore Preeti's logic that the Punjabi course taught at Montclair High is not respected or valued as much as all the other language courses taught at the school. Third, I explore how both the students and teachers understood what it means to bring identities into the curriculum. Lastly, I focus specifically on the school and teacher leaders at Montclair High and examine how their varying leadership beliefs and practices seemed in some cases to alleviate and in other cases to exacerbate the disaffection experienced by the Brown boys.

“Punjabi Evenings”

I had heard from another teacher that Preeti had organized and conducted multicultural evenings for the South Asian students at the school. At an appropriate time in our interview, I asked her to share with me her thoughts and rationale for this event. As she began her story, I distinctly heard in her voice a slash of a hidden hurt that needed air and light.

When I first came to the school, I decided to do this Punjabi multicultural evenings, actually not multicultural, but Punjabi evenings. It was an opportunity for my Punjabi [students in] grade 9 to 12 to showcase some poetry, dancing, culture, songs, skits, something about their cultures like

the festivals. On some occasions we focused on either Diwali or Vaisakhi. The purpose of doing these evenings was two-fold. First, for parents to see the good things about their kids; put them on stage and have them recognize that they are doing something great at this school. Second, was to get the community *into* [emphasizes] the school. To break that barrier, break that wall down for them; whether it was through an evening function or not, but just to break that barrier, and so they could walk down the hallway and not think the school is so grand and unapproachable. I mean for many of them, the school is so intimidating, especially if they aren't used to a different way of doing things. In this way, it allowed them into the rotunda, into the hallway, into the washrooms. That was great, it worked great; many parents were very pleased. In my second year, 250 community members showed up. They were so happy; they totally appreciated it. I had so many parents come up to me and rave about their kids, which was a nice change. You know what was sad though, it was not much appreciated by the staff; in fact, very little staff turned out for that. I remember they were given free tickets and they knew how much time I had put into it. Even our own language department didn't show [voice tightened and her voice frowns]. Very interesting right? [Silent for a few seconds]

I don't think it had anything to do with me per se. I think it was because of the Brown boys. No, I *know* it was because of the Brown guys! [raises her voice in disgust] Honestly. I honestly believe that it was because it was Punjabi [the course she taught]. I had maybe one handful of teachers [raises her hand and points to her five fingers] who have witnessed this in all the years I did it; maybe four of them. One of the four went into administration. Other than the administration, the staff did not support this! [outright resentment in her voice] Actually, even the administration didn't really support me or the evening. I mean, when you put together a function like this, I mean, I don't want accolades but some sort of acknowledge on the PA the next day would have been nice. Like, "thanks to the Punjabi students for an outstanding performance" or something like this, but nothing was ever mentioned. No appreciation. Nothing! Nothing was ever mentioned in the five years that I did it! [Frustration but sadness in her voice] But if it was the drama students or the music students or the school's band that performed at the community theatre, the next day, there would always be a PA announcement: "Thank you for the band department for putting on a great show, da da, da." As I am telling you this, I am realizing how deeply the Punjabi students were slighted. Actually, when you don't appreciate or acknowledge these kinds of evenings, you are slighting the whole [Punjabi] community. You know, no acknowledgement from administration and the staff didn't support it! [incredulous] For the Punjabi students, it was one of the most prized possessions for them. They loved it. They used to beg for more. [shakes her head]

Preeti, in the first five years of teaching at Montclair High School, had organized annual “Punjabi evenings” where her students, who were enrolled in the Punjabi course that she was teaching, could showcase their diverse talents for the entire school and surrounding community to enjoy. According to Preeti, it was a tremendous success for the South Asian parents, family members, and students. Not only did the event provide an opportunity for the parents of these students “to see the good things about their kids,” but equally as important for Preeti, it broke down “the barrier ... the wall” that psychologically separated the parents from the school. Since most of the South Asian parents, according to Preeti, hardly ever attended any of the school functions—from parent-teacher nights, when both parent and teacher meet to discuss their student/child’s progress, to post-secondary evenings, when students and their families are provided with an opportunity to listen to and converse with university or college recruiters from all over the country—the “Punjabi evening” became a safe and comfortable occasion for these parents to experience the physical and psychological space of the school.

Half way through her telling, Preeti realized the degree of resentment toward her colleagues she had repressed over the years. After mentioning how much the South Asian students and community truly “loved” these evenings, she admitted that the staff and administration at her school, not only did not support the event, but did not appreciate all the effort Preeti had devoted to preparing for the event. Her feelings of hurt and resentment grew more intense the more she thought and spoke about her colleagues’ lack of support. She hinted in the above excerpt, and later explicitly confirmed at the end of the interview, how angry she felt both at her colleagues for their disinterest in this event and at herself for not addressing with her colleagues the disappointment and hurt she felt

by their indifference. Preeti claimed that if the drama, music, or band clubs—that comprised mostly White and Asian students—performed for the school or the wider community, the administration would not only laud their performances but honor the teachers who sponsored the events. She posited that the “Punjabi evening” lacked the cachet or eminence because it featured the South Asian students and community. The South Asian communities, in general, and the Brown boys, in particular, did not command the respect of her colleagues to warrant any type of personal or school investment.

The Language Course of Punjabi

For Preeti, my question had also triggered an avalanche of insights and personal revelations on her colleagues’ deficit and patronizing view of the Punjabi courses she had been teaching for a number of years.

The program itself, because it is Punjabi, is not highly respected or seen as credible compared to other languages. ... Unlike French—which is treated as the *crème de la crème* language course—or even Spanish, Punjabi has a lack of respect within the school. The fact that there are Brown kids—25 to 30 of them—in one Punjabi course, it doesn’t seem worthwhile or respected like the other language courses. There is a, a, [searching for a word,

Unfortunately, I had already interviewed three of the four educational leaders in the school, so I could only solicit the thoughts of one administrator on the “value” of the “Punjabi evenings.” Ridley, as I mentioned in Chapter 7, who clearly advocates for a pluralist form of multiculturalism, believes that the school truly values and supports the event. When I mentioned that I had heard the attendance of the staff and administration over the years for this event had been negligible, he claimed ignorance on the matter. “I have attended this fabulous celebration on one occasion but admittedly not every year. Because of the number of events a school holds each year, it

which prompts me to say: “hierarchy?”] yes, exactly, hierarchy even in my own department. Punjabi would be ranked at the bottom. The French course or even Spanish has way more respect attached to it than Punjabi.

is hard for an administrator to attend all of them.”

Like the vertical mosaic (Porter, 1965), I examined in Chapter 5, Preeti claims that the language courses taught at Montclair High are hierarchized, with French positioned at the top of the rung garnering the most respect and Punjabi positioned at the bottom rung garnering the least respect. Her colleagues at the school, according to Preeti, deemed Punjabi a lowly subject. Ironically, even the colleagues in her own language department, who are usually territorial or custodial about all languages taught in the school, treated Punjabi as an inferior course. She believes that the course is perceived as subordinate because of the large number of Brown students who are enrolled in it: “The fact that there are Brown kids—25 to 30 of them—in one Punjabi course, it doesn’t seem worthwhile or respected like the other language courses.” Not only are the Brown students seen as deficit, but the course, too, is seen as inferior. She surmises that the inferior status of the course is a result of, among other reasons, only Brown students registering in the course. The implication is that because Brown students, in general, and Brown boys, in particular, are inferior academically, the course also must be inferior. Like special education classes or remedial courses in English, humanities, or math that are all too frequently positioned in schools as inferior, the Punjabi course, too, is seen as inferior.

Preeti suggests that even the administration is not supportive of the Punjabi course. Given that the school has long been aware of the academic and behavioural challenges, the administrators have exacerbated the situation by further marginalizing them from the nucleus of the school. She posits that even though the administration has long been aware of the academic and behavioural challenges experienced by the Brown boys and that a large majority of these boys enrol in the Punjabi course, by assigning the course to be taught in a temporary portable outside the main school building, they continue to marginalize, physically and psychologically, these boys. According to Preeti, the administration has scheduled all the Punjabi courses, year after year, to be taught in a portable that is remote to the school's main building.

Each year, I have been in the portable. If you are going to put a program out there then you are sending a strong message to both students and parents. This [the Punjabi course] is not of value. Everything else, like French or Spanish is inside the main building of the school. What does that tell you about the importance of those subjects compared to Punjabi?

For Punjabi to be housed in a portable while all other language courses are housed in the main building of the school, for Preeti, is a clear message from the administration, to all the students and parents, that Punjabi is not valued at the school. She admitted that the main school building did not have enough space to accommodate all the course offerings and therefore required the use of portables, but to ascribe the transient and disreputable physical space of a portable to the Punjabi course and not the other language courses, year after year, was unjust. Instead of creatively exploring different scheduling and space options for all the courses offered at the school, the administrators chose to assign a portable space for only the Punjabi language courses. For the administration to acknowledge that the school has significant challenges with the Brown boys and still

choose to marginalize them and the course from the main body of the school was, for Preeti, unacceptable.

Gurmant and Bal corroborate Preeti's assertion that Punjabi, the course, garners little respect in the school. In an interview I had with Gurmant, a "smart" Brown boy, he recalled a conversation he recently had with his social studies teacher. The social studies teacher had asked Gurmant to meet with him after school to discuss his social studies marks that had taken a dip during the last few weeks. Gurmant was an honour roll student who experienced success in most, if not all of his courses. His social studies teacher asked him how he was fairing in his other courses.

I told him that I was getting an 'A' in Punjabi, art, and math. He said, 'Punjabi and Art don't count; they're not going to bring you success in life ... that's good for math; what are you getting in English and the sciences?'

In sharing this experience with me, Gurmant's point was not to highlight how his social studies teacher had dismissed or minimized the importance or legitimacy of the Punjabi course, but to defend his bigger point that very rarely did he have an opportunity in his classes to explore or share his lived experiences as a South Asian male student who had travelled to India every summer since the seventh grade. Upon learning incidentally in my interview with him that he accompanied his father and mother every year to work in a family sponsored/owned orphanage in India, I asked him one of my standard questions (see interview protocol in Appendix 1): "Do(es) your school/teacher(s)/class(es) encourage you to express/bring your identit(ies) to your school/school work? Think of some specific experiences, incidents, anecdotes that would help me understand." It was this question that led to an in depth conversation about how the language course of Punjabi but more so, the cultural, familial, and religious lives of the South Asian students

in the school were rarely integrated into the curricular conversations of his classes. I will examine this point of integrating students' lived experiences in the curriculum in the next section.

Bal, a Brown boy, also alluded to the “dissed” reputation of the Punjabi course, but couched it in an altogether different perspective than did Gurmant. He complained that most of the courses he was taking were uninteresting and irrelevant. Even Punjabi was a waste of time.

It's a joke. Everyone knows it is a joke. All the Punjabi students know, it's the easiest way to get a language credit ... My Biology teacher told me, 'if you can't get your homework done at home, do it when you're in Punjabi.' ... He totally dissed Punjabi; even other teachers know that Punjabi is a joke!

I clarified with Bal what he meant by “joke.” He made clear that it was not that the students did not do anything of value in the course; in fact, as he recalled some activities and in-class projects he had completed, he was surprised at how much he actually liked them. For him, the joke was the reputation attached to the course. He claimed that the course had a “Mickey Mouse” reputation: A dummy course reserved for Brown students. “If it was an important course, wouldn't you see other students (non- South Asian) taking it?” Even his teachers, according to Bal, who are supposed to value education thought the course was a waste of time; otherwise, Bal reasoned, his Biology teacher would not have suggested for him to complete his biology homework during Punjabi class.

Lived Experiences as Part of Curriculum

Let me revisit the important conversation that I had begun with Gurmant above. As I had done with forty-six other students in this study, I had asked him whether/how his educators encouraged him to express/bring his identities to his school/school work.

My purpose in asking this question was to understand what kind of impact teachers had on their students' engagement in learning, if any, by integrating their students' lived experiences into the curriculum. More specifically, did the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High encourage the disaffected Brown boys to bring their lived experiences into the curriculum and *habitus* of the school? And if they did, what kind of effect did it have on them? After all, extensive educational literature I cited in Chapter 2 claims that when teachers build into their teaching their students' diverse socio-cultural realities, prior experiences, and multiple cultural understandings, then academic interest, engagement, and achievement increase (Bishop, 2001; Brown University, 2003; Calderon, 1997; Duncan-Andrade, 2005, 2006, 2007; Gay, 2000, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Kincheloe, 2007; Villegas et. al. 2002; and Weinstein et. al. 2004).

Gurmant professed that he had very few occasions to share his experiences in his class. Even though he had accrued a wealth of experiences in his travels every summer to the orphanage in India, he claimed in the four years that he attended Montclair High, very rarely did he speak in his classes of these or other aspects of his life outside of school. In his words,

I've never really been asked to place myself in anything we are learning. I've never been asked to bring my culture or life into things that we are learning. The way I see it is that school is about learning stuff you don't know ... sometimes it is interesting most times it's not. The point is that you learn it and just move on.

Gurmant captured the sentiments of the majority of the South Asian male and female students I interviewed. Most of the South Asian students claimed that their teachers did not encourage them to bring their life experiences into the class discussions, assignments, or projects. Except during current affairs discussion—when Indo-Canadian violence was

usually featured—or predictable occasions—such as Diwali or Vaisakhi—their teachers focused on issues, subjects, or problems that were rooted in the “official texts” of the course. Maninder, a Brown boy, summarizes this point well:

The only times that I can think of that teachers want to discuss anything about our lives or culture or religion is when there is a murder in the news. Like, in our English class, the only time that our teacher brings up Punjabi or Brown people is when we talk about crimes, gangs, violence, wife abuse, [and] drugs. It’s like there isn’t anything positive that they want to talk about—always the bad stuff.

Three South Asian students Arjan, Nirmit and Bal, expanded the boundaries of the “predictable occasions” when teachers felt compelled to invite the lived experiences of their students into the lessons they were teaching. Arjan, a male student, claimed that anytime a teacher—either in social studies or English—examined the subject of immigration, he or she would ask them to share their stories.

In the immigration unit we can share our story, our culture, but not in any other unit. ... In the immigration unit, we become the experts because everyone assumes that we are the immigrants. When the White students say, ‘what do we write about?’ the teacher says, ‘I know, it’s hard, but maybe you can interview your grandparents ... because, you know, Canada is a land of immigrants.’ Well, hello, I was born in Canada too just like the White kid. Why do you automatically assume that I’m an immigrant?

Nimrit, a female student, shares a similar point:

I’m not sure if there are many opportunities for us to bring our identities into our school work. There was one time but it was one of my friends who brought it up; he said that “hey, do you know it’s Diwali today. So we talked about it in class. But, I have never really been asked to bring my culture or family or religion in ... [Later on in the interview] Actually, one of my teachers asked me about arranged marriages in class. I told her that I was too young and that if I married it would be into the Sikh community. I didn’t like that she asked me in front of everyone; it’s like ‘oh, you are Brown and Sikh, so you should know everything about arranged marriages.’ If it had something to do with the unit we were discussing and she asked me in private, I would’ve shared. But it didn’t have anything to do with it; it felt more like gossip.

Bal, a male student, is insightful:

Some teachers will tell you to connect a project or assignment to your life or experiences, but it is not part of the criteria that they evaluate you on. If it was really important, it would be on the rubric. Everything important or worth marks is on the rubric or exams, that's what they always tell us.

Arjan, Nimrit and Bal raise some important points; I will highlight two. First, these three students claim that their teachers rarely encouraged them or other South Asian students to bring their identities into the official curriculum of their courses. And if they did, it was during the predictable times of important festivals, ceremonies, and “the immigration unit.” These and other South Asian students interviewed alluded to the “token” nature associated with these types of conversations that were peripheral or tangential to the curriculum. Bal is compelling; he claims if their lived experiences really matter, their thoughts, perspectives, and ideas would somehow count for something in the evaluation criteria. After all, he claims, teachers always tell us “everything important or worth marks is on the rubric or exams.”

Second, Nimrit's experience could be an exemplar for an educator practicing essentialist multiculturalism. She became the spokesperson for arranged marriages. Nimrit qualifies her statement by clarifying that if the curriculum had anything to do with arranged marriages and that if she was given a choice—instead of being put on the spot—she would likely have engaged in the conversation. For Nimrit, however, it felt she was tokenized in a conversation that seemed more like gossip than anything else.

Interestingly, for the White students I interviewed the question of identity and curriculum was a difficult one. I had to re-phrase and, often, provide examples before they understood the intent or purpose of my query. Below, I excerpt a conversation I had

with Ethan; the first part of the exchange is very typical of the conversations I had with the other White students in this study. At the halfway mark—when we discuss cooking and food—the conversation takes a slightly different trajectory. I include this section as it captures lithely the manner in which most of the White students I interviewed viewed the notion of cultural identity.

Anish: [Standard question from interview protocol; see Appendix 1] Do your teachers encourage you to bring your identity or identities to your class projects, discussions, assignments, or school work? Think of some specific experiences, incidents, anecdotes that would help me understand.

Ethan: I don't really understand.

Anish: No worries. It is a very complicated question. Let me break it down and this time I'll try to speak English [wanting to get a laugh and to bring Ethan at ease]. Think about things that are important to you. Things that make up who you are. Let's start with what are some of the important things that make up who you are?

Ethan: [Starts listing] Courses that I find interesting. What I do afterschool like my extra-curricular activities. Other important things ... hmm... clothing that I wear and how the fashions change from year to year. My family ... [looks to me uncertain whether or not to continue and so I nod in approval]. Sports, I guess, I am on the swim team.

Anish: Excellent. So you have identified, pop culture, your family, and school. Super. All those aspects definitely make up who you are. Let me list a few more and you can tell me whether or not they make up who you are, ok?

Ethan: Sure.

Anish: Religion. Gender. Culture. Skin color. Amount of money—lots of it or a lack of it. Age. Being a teenager.

Ethan: [Answers yes to all except skin color.] I don't think the color of my skin has anything to do with me.

Anish: No?

Ethan: No; that would be racist.

Anish: How so?

Ethan: People would be judging my skin color and that is racist.

Anish: What about your culture? Can you share with me what you mean by culture?

Ethan: I am Anglo Canadian cause I was born here. My grandfather's culture is different; he is from Hungary. His food is different, he acts different, talks different. He has an accent and sometimes speaks Hungarian. The food is different; it is like really soupy food. The soupy food is mostly his culture. I eat pretty much what you find at the supermarket, like potatoes, chicken, rice, veggies, nothing that takes two hours to cook.

Anish: What takes two hours to cook?

Ethan: Cultural food.

Anish: So you don't eat cultural food but your grandfather does?

Ethan: No, my food is not cultural. Not at all. Actually, I call potatoes, rice, corn, and chicken White people's food. I talk to my non-White friend and he says that I am having like curry and spaghetti. I tell him, oh, I am having chicken.

Anish: So, chicken is White food? [Smiling and curious]

Ethan: Yes. When it is barbequed. [Smiling and serious]

Anish: But chicken cooked on the BBQ with the addition of tandoori spice becomes cultural food?

Ethan: Yes, because it has a certain flair to it.

Anish: So White food doesn't have flair.

Ethan: Yeah, it's bland. [Laughs]

By the end of the conversation, Ethan, like most of his White peers I interviewed, claimed that their teachers did not bring *any* students' identities into their learning. The purpose of curriculum, according to Ethan and other White students interviewed, was to teach what the "government" deemed important. Identity, culture, or others' experiences were not important unless they formed part of the content of the course curriculum. And

if they were part of the curriculum, the information had to be taught “objectively.” More broadly, however, cultural identity for the White students I interviewed was a problematic term. They had a difficult time identifying their own cultural identity. In the tradition of White studies (Giroux, 1998; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, 1998; McLaren, 1998), Whiteness was invisible and neutral. Compared to the cultures of others, White culture—if it was even considered a culture—was hard to identify. For these students, their way was the “normal” way of doing things. Different ways of doing things belonged to others’ cultures. “Bland,” in Ethan’s vocabulary, characterized White culture; “flair” characterized the culture of Others. To conclude, “invisibility” marked the White students’ understanding of their own cultural identity and “difference” marked their understanding of Others’ cultural identities. To see cultural identity from their viewing lens, thus, explains why the White students, first, had a difficult time understanding my question of identity and curriculum and, second, did not even see the importance of their teachers opening spaces in the curriculum to incorporate the cultural identities of their students.

Teachers’ Perspectives

The South Asian teachers had a different understanding than the White teachers of what it meant to encourage students to bring their identities to the curriculum. For all the White teachers, like their South Asian colleagues, opening up the curriculum to include the identities of their students was important. They all felt this practice was crucial to student learning. The similarity, however, ended there. For the White teachers, identities meant either religious or cultural. So, when each of the White teachers offered examples of how they achieved integrating identity with curriculum, they stated consistently that

when the “opportunities arose naturally,” they made the “necessary and obvious connections.” When pressed, the natural opportunities usually meant during the “immigration unit,” and timely religious celebrations or cultural festivals; very few White teachers offered examples—outside these stereotypical occasions. Ava, an English teacher began offering a suggestion and then realized part way through her explanation that the assignment she was attempting to describe was not fully developed or coherent.

We look at the idea of identity and how we hide and mollify our interest, desire, beliefs in order to adjust to whatever context we are in. So, with Grade 10s, this is one way I bring up their identities. I will start with them interviewing their families and then give them different pieces on what a poet might think (eg: TS Eliot—the Hollow man) and use that as a building point. One of the things I did this year was to use Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and the film *Apocalypse Now*—a complex text and film—but we have been building a sophisticated understanding of these types of issues this year. Anyway, I ask them [students] to bring in myths around this idea; they can bring myths from around the world. They can look at commentaries on it from the Bible, Torah, and the Sikh book (I can't think of what that is) and do presentations on it. That is them bringing in whatever they want to explore, whether it is faith based or cultural based. [Chuckles nervously] This is not coming out right ... you know, I don't think I have thought it through enough.

Two of the three South Asian teachers had a different understanding of what it meant to open up the curriculum to include the identities of their students. For them, integrating lived experiences into their lessons meant more than capitalizing on religious celebrations and cultural festivals. Amrit shares, in a lengthy excerpt, her understanding of “opening up the curriculum.”

I don't want to put kids in this token time and place where ‘you have to express this part of your identity thing.’ I don't think that is valuable for anyone—this is when you get into the weird multiculturalism thing—the obvious thing of what you think you should be sharing, when really that is not how the kids see it all. So, as I get to know my students, and test that understanding through conversations about them and what part of them they are comfortable with, then I create spaces *organically*. I create room in my assignments and lessons so that the kids can go in different

directions as long as I know that we are following the big ideas and covering the necessary skills.

So, last year, when I was doing a war, psychology and violence unit, I introduced the *Kite Runner* into this unit because I had access to the novels. I thought it would work with this unit and it is an easy read, so I tried it and it invited more kids in compared to some of the other choices we had. However, only one class picked it and the other class thought it was too easy for them. [Instead] they chose other novels that they thought were more difficult—which are all about identity anyways—like *Snow Falling on Cedars*, *Obasan*, *All Quiet in the Western Front*, and *Wars*. All these are about war and how war impacts your sense of self and how you understand yourself. And so, when we did this unit, there was one class—that didn't pick *Kite Runner*—who were very interested, as a class, in stories and creative writing. So in one assignment, I chose to show them two photos of the mounds of shoes left behind by the victims in the various extermination camps. I also got them to read a newspaper article about how a son of a Holocaust survivor started a “shoe project” to keep the stories and memories of the Holocaust alive. [Get's up from her chair in the middle of the interview to look for the newspaper article. Once she retrieves it, she reads an excerpt from it to me.

When Allied soldiers overran the Nazi death camps and freed the few remaining alive, they discovered piles of many thousands of shoes that once belonged to those who had been slain. Those who liberated Auschwitz in 1945 reported that the six barracks that escaped fires set by fleeing Nazis alone contained 38,000 pairs of men's shoes and 5,255 pairs of women's shoes. Shoes come in all colors and sizes, just like people, "Woody" Morawiec said, and so represent the personalities and humanity of each of those lost.

Amrit passionately begins to tell me one student's successful attempt at integrating the photos, newspaper article, and novel with the writing assignment. The following narrative represents the story-truth (Coulter et al., 2007).

As one of the major assignments for this unit, I asked my students to write a non-fiction story about an experience they have, at one time or another, had with

As Amrit chronicled how she sprung from the symbol of a shoe a fountain of stories, I was reminded of my own shoe story that still, to this day, shrinks who I am.

shoes. I explained that in the assignment, they had to artfully reveal a part of their own public or private identity using the theme of shoes. Complicated as the assignment sounds, most of my students blew me away with their assignments. One Brown boy, Abheet, who I know secretly loves politics, history of wars, and media—in other words, he loves social studies but he doesn't like the course social studies—wrote an amazing piece of work. He told a lovely story about his father, who visits auctions—"police auctions, seized stuff at the border auctions and other auctions"—to make a living. He buys at auctions and sells to dollar stores and other retail outlets. During one trip to an immigration auction, his father bought a hermetically sealed container. In many immigration auctions, because of the volume of merchandise, the containers are auctioned off sealed—sight unseen. Bidders don't

It was time for our family to visit the Army & Navy; not only was it "clearance Friday"—the last Friday of every month, which beckoned bargain hunters from every corner of the Lower Mainland—but it was time, finally, for our family to buy shoes. I was tired of trudging around that Fall in wet socks. Lucky for my dad, on "clearance Friday," children's shoes were discounted even further: Two pairs for ninety-nine cents. In a particularly good mood that day, my dad summoned my brother and me to dig through the mountain of orphan shoes that were showcased near the front window of the store. "Quick, find two of the same size before they are all gone," my dad whispered in Kutchi³⁷, as he fired the start gun. The competition was on. My brother and I had to find our shoe pairs before the other thirty competitors reversed my dad's smile.

After the store clerk had warned us twice that the doors to the store had closed, my dad finally convinced my brother that since he was

³⁷ Indian dialect spoken in the Kutch region of Gujarat.

have a clue about the contents of the container. They have to bid blind and hope for the best. So his father hoped for the best. To his surprise, he found a container full of high-end Nike Air runners. "Home-run," his father thought; this buy could yield thousands!" Abheet's father contacted his list of buyers and within minutes had struck a lucrative deal with an athletic shoes retailer to purchase each and every one of the estimated two thousand athletic shoes. There was one condition to the sale, however; all the shoes had to be sorted by size. "No problem, Abheet's father thought, "the sorting and matching can become a family exercise." Once the content of the container was emptied in the garage and the guffaw turned into an occasional chortle, Abheet and his sister began sorting. They were soon joined by their mother, father, and aunt who had changed into their athletic wear anticipating a

right handed, his right foot was slightly longer than his left foot. In fact, the right foot of right-handed people, he declared, always grew faster than their left foot. Wearing a size 3 on his right foot and a size 2 on his left foot, my six year old brother glared at me implausibly. My dad looked at me to close the deal. At ten, I knew it was wrong. So wrong. I also knew that almost every night, when my brother, sister, and I were in bed, my mom and dad would whimper sadly wondering what kind of curse had befallen them..

"Dad's right," I lied. "You won't even feel the difference." I wanted to cry. Relieved, my dad strode to the cashier who was waiting with the irritated store manager. Mining his wallet for correct change, my dad whispered to me: "75 cents for 1 and 99 cents for 2; are you sure you couldn't find another pair for each of you?"

It was almost two weeks after I had successfully found my matching pair of shoes that Evan, my classmate, directed the entire class to look at my shoes. Thank god it did not

gratifying workout. After about fifteen minutes of futile sorting, Abheet shouted out incredulously “all of these shoes are left foots!”

After Abheet’s dream of a flat screen TV evaporated, he convinced his parents to donate all the left foot athletic shoes to a Landmine Foundation he had heard about at a presentation in his social studies class.

Grumet (1995) defines curriculum as “the conversation that makes sense of things ... It is the process of making sense with a group of people of the systems that shape and organize the world that we can think about together” (p. 19). I submit that Amrit believes in and practices Grumet’s understanding of curriculum. Using curriculum as a “conversation that makes sense of things,” Amrit mobilizes the identities of her students. She mines the “identity-based perspectives” (Moya, 2006) of her students “to see what insights into an issue they might have to offer” (p. 108).

happen to my brother; the added embarrassment would have crippled him. Going over the supply list and parent consent form for our school “bowling field trip,” Mr. Cousins was explaining to our class that we all had to wear bowling shoes before we were allowed to bowl. When Sarah asked what bowling shoes looked like, Evan chimed in: “It’s what Anish always wears, even in PE!” Trying to save my dignity, Mr. Cousins retorted, “He’s lucky, he won’t have to rent them so he will be the first to bowl.”

Many years later when in University, I discovered during an extended coffee conversation, that Army & Navy frequently bought out the merchandise of bankrupt stores and businesses. It hit me then. No wonder, I thought, in the mountain of bowling shoes for sale, there were always so many worn singles with the shoe size painted boldly on the heel. I remembered that my right shoe occasionally had this “black eye.” I also remembered that with a few vigorous scrubs of my mom’s nail polish remover, it eventually rubbed off.

She does not mobilize her students' identities only during stereotypical occasions such as religious celebrations, cultural festivals, or the "immigration unit." For her, mobilizing student identities *only* in these ways amounts to, as she says, a "weird multiculturalism thing," or more accurately, essentialist multiculturalism, where the Eurocentric gaze fixes difference or diversity as exotic and unique and externalizes it as the amusing or entertaining Other. Mobilizing identities for Amrit was a much deeper process. In the spirit of a critical multiculturalist, Amrit, attempted to create pedagogical and curricular spaces for students to profit from their multiple social locations and capitalize on their different meaning-making systems to better apprehend, explore, and represent the world. Amrit created, in her words, "a big curriculum" in a way that invited her students to bring in identities of their own choosing and on their own terms.

Having said this, I wish I knew if Amrit and the other South Asian teachers ignored or engaged with the curricular and pedagogical opportunities offered by timely cultural festivals and religious celebrations. I wondered if they explored with all their students special occasions such as Diwali, Vaisakhi, or Ramadan; and if they did, how would they ensure not to romanticize, exoticize, or fetishize the experiences of their South Asian students. I wondered if they would remember that their South Asian students' experiences, like all human beings' experiences are complex, contradictory, and indeterminate. I wondered if they understood that their South Asian students did not have a homogenous understanding of these festivals and celebrations. In fact, I wondered if they would agree with what I had done—as a high school English and social studies teacher for fourteen years—which was to help my South Asian students understand these

special events in relation to the hegemonic forces of the dominant society. During my last few years of teaching high school, I attempted to encourage my South Asian students to interrogate how they positioned themselves, how others—from their own communities and the dominant society—positioned them in light of these special events. I wish I had had the presence of mind, in my interviews with the South Asian teachers, to have asked these and other questions.

School and Teacher Leadership

Throughout this study, I have attempted to best represent, where and when appropriate, the perspectives of both the teachers and school leaders collectively. Unless there was a clear distinction, I did not differentiate between the teachers and the leaders. In this section, however, I focus exclusively on the leadership beliefs and practices of the school and teacher leaders and how they seemed to both alleviate and exacerbate the disaffection experienced by the Brown boys. At the beginning of each interview I conducted with the four school and teacher leaders, I asked each individual to share with me his or her educational philosophy. Using the

I must underline that the criteria I used to roughly distinguish the leadership styles among the teacher and school leaders are crude. In fact, the classification of leadership styles was not my original purpose at all. I simply make this distinction now to comment on an important theme that emerged as I conducted these interviews and observed how they lead in the field. That is, it became obvious to me very early on in the interviews and field work that there seemed to exist a disparity between how the educational leaders positioned themselves as leaders and how they described themselves actually leading their students and the school. If I had identified at the outset that I wanted to investigate the authenticity between the leaders' stated beliefs and practices, I would have

<p>methods of coding and theme identification and development, I discussed extensively in Chapter 3, I positioned three of the school leaders somewhere in the continuum of a critical leadership paradigm. The other school leader I positioned, using his own words, as an “old-school” leader, whose</p>	<p>employed a different research methodology altogether. Nevertheless, because of the striking inconsistencies between the leaders’ stated beliefs and practices I repeatedly heard in the interviews, observed in the field, and later confirmed by analyzing the field notes and data, I make these findings explicit here.</p>
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beliefs and practices were rooted predominately in the positivist and transactional leadership paradigm. The leaders who espoused beliefs from the critical leadership paradigm described their leadership beliefs and practices using words and concepts such as “valuing diversity,” “encouraging multiple perspectives,” promoting social responsibility,” and “ensuring cross-cultural understanding.” The words and concepts used by the “old-school” leader ranged from “I believe in rules that are black and white ... if you break one, darn well expect a consequence—no exceptions” to “the way I see it is when students don’t know who is in charge, they believe they are in charge and that means trouble” and “the reason why our [educational] system is in need of values education [is] to strengthen our understanding of what it means to be Canadian” to “the criterion of socio-cultural consciousness is leftist intellectual rhetoric.”

Of the three teacher and school leaders who articulated many of the principles of critical leadership in their philosophies, only one, however, seemed to consistently apply these principles in her school practice. For the other two leaders, there seemed to be a veritable dissonance between their beliefs and practices when relating to and leading the South Asian students, generally, and the Brown boys, specifically. Let me begin with

Mary, a college professor of five years, high school English and special education teacher for over twenty years, and a school leader for ten years. Montclair was Mary's second school as a vice-principal; she had spent two full years at this school. As a "dialogical" leader and one who "attempt[s] to explore with my students different options to solve a personal or school problem," she claimed that this approach, unfortunately, was treated with much scepticism both by her students and colleagues. She adduced that her students were not used to an authority figure open and willing to understand misbehaviours or problems from their perspectives. According to Mary, the Brown boys expected an authority figure to automatically blame them and mete out punishment that they believed to be excessive or unfair. She, however, in the two years as a vice-principal at the school, attempted to rupture this power hierarchy. As a dialogical leader, she endeavoured to explore with her students the source of the problem, the consequences of their misbehaviours, and most importantly, how the students could take ownership of their actions and misbehaviours. In her own words,

I don't yell, scream, and slam the door. It is not part of my script. I am not doing speech number 34. Because I don't follow what they [students] are used to expecting when in the office, I think there is a deep suspicion of why I am talking to them this way and it's a bit 'woo woo' [Age of Aquarius, new age, alternative]. Most of the time, the students are speechless, thinking, 'what do you mean—you want to understand what happened from my stance?' They'll search my eyes. Sometimes I will see a flicker of a smile, but then it will shut down. I remember talking to one of the 'disaffected South Asian males' that you like to call them. He had some difficulties. His rap sheet in the school was long and his English teacher did not want him in her class anymore. I gave him a few things to do in order for him to be able to stay in this school and also finish English independently. I watched him like a hawk because that was part of the deal throughout the year. I called him in regularly. I don't think he ever believed that I did it for the reasons I did do it. Near the end, he was about to graduate and I said something to him like, 'you are such a gift and that you are stepping into the star that you are.' I could see him looking at me with deep suspicion and a little smile came on and he quickly shut it

down. I thought that I hope you heard that; I hope it settles in your mind and that you will take that away with you. I know that he is in a difficult dark place right now. I think he is a good person and that he will be able to step beyond the dark place that he is in if he believes in himself to do it. I wanted to show him that I believed in him and that I, representing the school, did not want to abandon him as he probably expected.

Mary's long term objective, when "disciplining" as she phrased it, was always to teach and empower her students to behave in socially conscious ways. "Teach them, show them how, don't just assume they know ... often they are simply begging for help but do not know the best way to ask." Teaching her students appropriate ways of handling life and school's problems, for Mary, meant ensuring that they had a plan in place, clear support, and clear consequences.

For me, I see misbehaving kids unable to put their own limits in place. Their misbehaviour is like them really looking at me 'to simply rein me in please—I am just afloat here and I am looking for someone to blame if I take this route, so please help me.' That's the way I see it. So I work with them and offer them a clear way to see the situation. It is a bit like, well, it's a crude metaphor, but like a bowling alley and where do the gutters need to be and whether they need bumpers. I help them see the direction, but provide them with bumpers and [emphasizes] gutters.

Mary believes, however, that the majority of her colleagues do not see her as an effective educational leader. She claims that many of them expect her to enforce the school rules in an authoritarian manner, similar to that of a sheriff reprimanding or incarcerating outlaws. If she does not project the image of a tough, no nonsense vice-principal willing to dole out suspensions, she believes, she is seen as an ineffective school administrator—especially when disciplining the Brown boys. Mary explains:

There is an assumption that I am not doing my job if I'm not playing the heavy and laying down the law and don't suspend. I get very discouraged. I get very tired and sometimes feel incompetent. Cause, I am looking for the long term lesson and growth that the South Asian students needs to make and I truly want them to be connected with the school because it's a huge part of their life in this community. They are not just visitors; they

live here for a big chunk of their waking lives. How can we influence them if they think we don't care? It is a difficult role because I am not earning my stripes for the number of suspensions or the number of times I make them pick up garbage or other vice-principal kinds of things. And it has taken a while for the kids to know that I am serious because I don't yell or threaten. I very quietly follow through with what I say I am going to do ... I know there will be kids that do not hear my approach. I believe some will thrive with it and for some it will take time. Some will appreciate the respect and often I see it coming back to me. This approach is certainly true for my values. I don't want to slip and lose this. It is certainly way more time consuming. I don't know if it is only me playing in my own bed [laughs] or whether it is more effective, you know? Maybe it doesn't work in this context. I certainly hope it does. It certainly should work for humans.

Even though Mary believes she is a kind and caring school administrator, who believes passionately that schools are communities where all students should belong and feel "connected," she feels "very discouraged," "tired," and "incompetent" at Montclair High. She attests that the teachers on staff and even her leadership colleagues do not think she is "earning [her] stripes" as an effective school administrator because she does not employ punitive disciplinary measures such as suspensions, detentions, and garbage-picking schedules that have had history and prominence in the school. Although Mary realizes that her leadership style will eventually pay dividends over the long term, she is beginning to lose faith that as a lone voice in the school, will she ever, even in the short term, achieve any positive results. Despite her belief in a leadership style rooted in the ethics of social justice, agency, and caring, she is beginning to believe that without a critical number of colleagues also advocating for and implementing similar ethics, regrettably, she will never be able to effect any significant change in the school.

Mary's perceptions of what the majority of her colleagues thought about her leadership style were borne out by the majority of the teachers I interviewed. These teachers—South Asian teachers included—complained that because of "a renegade

administrator ... who beats to her own drum” as one teacher phrased it, the leadership at the school was divided and thus ineffective in dealing consistently and firmly with the Brown boys. Parker captures the sentiments of the majority of these teachers:

When I first started teaching there was a group of teachers in the school that had been there for a long time and had established a clear tone for the school. There was a very strong administrator, actually, the first two principals were very strong, strong in their presence in the school and they had that respect slash fear, where the kids didn’t cross the line because there was fear there. In the last little while, changes in administration have changed the tone of the school in the respect of the school. The rules and guidelines in the way we used to deal with things here, seem to, at least in the perception of the staff, have got a little too soft, especially by one of the administrators who is trying to impose her style onto us. A firmer hand or a structured hand is needed to make some of these corrections ... that would be true for the Brown guys and all the other troublemakers [laughs].

Parker, like the majority of his colleagues I interviewed, is clear that an effective administrator must be “strong” and must have “a firm hand or a structured hand” in order to be able to make the necessary “corrections” on the behaviours of the “Brown boys” and “other troublemakers.” Mary’s brand of leadership, which later on in the interview he characterizes as “a lot of negotiating and second chances” is “soft” and does not command “respect slash fear” the way that he believes recalcitrant students should be disciplined. “Very strong administrators,” for Parker and many of his colleagues, were leaders—like the previous two principals of the school—who could elicit “fear” in students so that they “didn’t cross the line.” Interestingly, earlier in the interview, Parker claimed that Montclair over the years has been “rather unsuccessful” at dealing effectively with the Indo-Canadian boys. When I reminded him of his comment, he retorted, “now you see how much we are relying on your findings [laughs].”

Frankly, I was unsure how much more of “a firm and structured hand” was required at Montclair High. In fact, from my extensive fieldwork and analysis of the data,

I could characterize that the majority of the strategies and processes used by the teacher and school leaders to discipline the Brown boys as surveillance dependent, non-collaborative, and target oriented. As I have already examined, in Chapter 8, the effects and consequences of the surveillance regimes on the Brown boys, let me briefly examine the non-collaborative and targeting approaches employed by the school and teacher leaders at Montclair High.

Non-Collaborative Decision-Making

In Chapter 7, I explored the Brown boys' propensity to convoke in large groups, which the school staff characterized as unwieldy, intimidating, and aggressive. To address this "swarming," as Mandeep recounted a White colleague describing it at an informal meeting, the school administration with the help of a few interested teachers devised a plan. A decision was made that students at Montclair High would not be permitted to congregate in social groups larger than five. If the rule was violated, the consequence would be garbage duty, which entailed picking up garbage in the school compound immediately after the dismissal bell. This plan conceived for the school but targeted against the Brown boys proved a dismal failure. Immediately upon hearing the rule many of the Brown boys purposely began to congregate in larger groups. When the teacher and school leaders accused them of breaking the rule, not one charged Brown boy reported for garbage duty after school. In the words of Jeevan, "What are they really going to do? C'mon, what a joke! Tell us we can't hang with friends? They might as well tell us we can't use the toilets!"

For Jeevan and others whom I interviewed, the rule was, as one Brown boy phrased it, "racist." According to Preeti, a South Asian teacher, the manner in which the

school chose to address this situation only “further deteriorated their relationship with these kids [Brown boys].” I invited reflections about this rule during my interviews with the teacher and school leaders, but aside from Mary, not one leader wanted to examine or elaborate on the subject. Ridley’s comment captured the sentiments of the other two leaders: “it [the decision] couldn’t be effectively monitored and it required too many of the school’s resources ... at least we tried it to see that it didn’t work.” For Mary, the strategy and, more importantly, the intent, were “disrespectful” and “oppressive.” She claimed that she chose to see the situation differently. She suggested to the discipline committee that a few of them should engage a large group of Brown boys to discuss the issue. Perhaps if the Brown boys heard the school’s perspectives and the school sincerely heard the Brown boys’ perspectives, a mutually agreeable decision could precipitate. According to Mary, however, her suggestion “fell on deaf ears.”

Targeting

Targeting was another strategy the school administration employed “sometimes” when problems erupted in the school. Jack, the school principal, explains:

Regardless of the ethnicity of a school, there is always a group that is more wrongdoing than other groups. Sadly, the South Asians are often targeted here. There is a common joke amongst administrators, sadly, that if you don’t know who did something wrong and you pick one of those kids [ones who usually get into trouble] and suspend them, you have a pretty good chance that you are right [laughs] ... I have been guilty of this too that when something happens and a group of quote, unquote the Brown guys that they like to refer to themselves as, hanging around, I will ask them all the questions. If they complain, I usually say, ‘We ask you the questions because you were visibly part of that area.’ Part of it too is that [laughs] the kids that have been to the office often are the ones you notice more in the bad situation and so you tend to wonder about them more and choose them more. Saying that, I don’t really know how to fix this other than me trying to be open with them.

I will not elaborate any further on the pathologizing and criminalizing nature of this type of leadership practice, but I will ask, perhaps for further research, why educational leaders who espouse principles rooted in critical leadership engage in practices that are so unjust and undemocratic?

Interestingly, a version of this question held Preeti, Amrit and myself in a dialogical trance for over forty-five minutes after school one day. I tried to persuade them that a number of factors had to converge for leaders to act or behave in such a contradictory manner. I argued for an explanation that included: age and experience, context, personal biases, perceptions of power, and systemic inequalities. Both Amrit and Preeti argued that my reasons were far too complicated. They claimed that if my suppositions were correct, there would be fewer leaders in their school district who would pathologize the lives of South Asian students. All these factors, they argued, could not possibly converge at once for so many leaders to be affected. They suggested the explanation was much simpler: “discrimination!” Both Amrit and Preeti shared several personal examples of school and teacher leaders in other schools and at the school board office who had made derogatory comments directly to them about South Asian students and the South Asian cultures. I excerpt below two of their anecdotes:

Amrit: I can tell you stories that could go on and on! X [a school leader] was in my class last week, and he knows that I am going to India in the summer and he was making fun of India. ‘You people do this, you people do that! Racist stuff, which everyone finds hilarious. He even does the head-roll-thing while he talks. Dah, dah, dah.’ I said, ‘whatever, X.’ I told him jokingly, ‘I haven’t been to India but I am Indian, so watch it!’ He said, ‘you are about as Indian as I am!’

Anish: And he felt comfortable saying that to you?

Amrit: Oh yeah! The staff here and maybe it is because of my personality and the way I look—don’t think I am Indian. I hear them say all the time, ‘You are

different! Where did you go to school? Where's your accent?' I am part of the community and I am not. I have one leg in and one leg out. That is how they see me. Maybe that is why they can admit how racist they really are! [laughs].

Preeti shares her anecdote.

Preeti: Here's another one [story]. Someone at the board office told me to quit. You know what she told me? This will kill you! You know, I am a portfolio leader so we met at the school board office; when she found out that I was thinking about teaching only social studies and no Punjabi courses next year, she said, 'thank god!' She has been telling me, that 'I would never teach what you are teaching. Stop teaching those boys [South Asian males]! Thank god! I thought you were going to get killed. Shot one day. You know men in your culture!' She said, 'you know all that domestic violence; you know the men in your culture. I honestly thought that you would be shot one day.' Anish, this is what they think of the boys and they are willing to admit it to me! [Raises her voice as she says this last statement]. This is someone at the board office! She was an administrator here, at this school for a long time. I am constantly fighting this! It is tiring! I can't fight all these battles. That is why I am letting go of Punjabi. Why not be a regular social studies teacher and not fight this battle! I am so tired of the stereotypes. It wears you down. When she [school board leaders] said that I thought she was joking! I go, 'yeah, right, you are joking!' She said, 'no! I am dead serious. Have you read the paper lately?' She said, 'with all the domestic violence last year! I thought you were going to get shot! I always think that you are going to get shot in that school!' Me! [Incredulous, Preeti points to her chest]

Anish: Does she know that you are South Asian? [sarcastically]

Preeti: Yes, that is why she told me! That is why she thinks that I am going to get shot! Because I don't give in. I have a strong personality. And you know [imitates the school board leader's voice] 'because of all the domestic violence and the men in my culture, I'm not going to survive.'

The point that both Amrit and Preeti were making by sharing their personal experiences was not that school and teacher leaders were racist, but how blatantly explicit they were about sharing these racist comments with them. Amrit and Preeti's lived experiences in the school system convinced them that discrimination against males in the South Asian communities is endemic. Both of them tried to emphasize that the deficit thinking and pathologizing practices against the South Asian males were deeply embedded in the prevailing institutional *habitus* of the school. For them, my endeavour to

problematize the leaders' inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices seemed callow and foolhardy. They interpreted my stance as a way to soften the blame or partially absolve the perpetrators of the low regard they had for South Asian males. Although I tried to rationalize my questions and perspectives as sociological musings, I could not help but think how intractable, in general, individuals' beliefs can be and how deeply implicated I am at hardening their beliefs by simply asking questions and offering alternative ways of framing issues.

To summarize, in this chapter I examined some of the pathologizing beliefs and practices that were embedded in the *habitus* of the school. First, I explored how majority of the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High not only insulated themselves from the South Asian communities, but how many of them inferiorized and even pathologized the cultural capital that these communities had to offer. Second, I explored from both the students and teachers perspectives what they understood by the notion of identities in the curriculum. Lastly, I examined incidents and examples of how incoherent and contradictory leadership practices at the school seemed to exacerbate the disaffection experienced by the Brown boys. Even though one educational leader attempted to practice a transformative type of leadership, the opposing practices of her colleagues, she believed, minimized or even negated the long term benefits she aspired to foment. In the next chapter, I explore how the Brown boys are complicit in the construction of their own pathologized identities.

11. COMPLICITY OF THE BROWN BOYS

In this chapter, using narratives extensively, I examine how the Brown boys are complicit in the pathologizing of their own identities. A pivotal incident occurred at Montclair High's winter formal—an annual formal dinner and dance celebration for the graduating class—which initiated a chain of events that allowed me to examine closely the Brown boys' roles and responsibilities in the pathologizing discourses that, indeed, shape their identities at Montclair High School. It is this chain of events that I systematically unfold narratively.

Entry of this sort into an entr'acte where all the really critically things seemed just to have happened yesterday and just about to happen tomorrow, induces an uncomfortable sense of having come too late and arrived too early ... it always seemed not the right time, but a pause between right times. (Geertz as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 64)

Geertz captures exactly my sentiments during the first couple of weeks of my study. Although I was well aware that I was entering into an inquiry field where my participants were already living out their storied lives and that, I too, came into the field with my orbit of thick stories, I still had that “uncomfortable sense of having come too late and arrived too early.” Formative events that many of my participants referenced had just occurred and I feared that only when I left the inquiry field would the stars once again align and yield another event that would alter Montclair's trajectory in an altogether different direction. In my more lucent moments, however, I was acutely aware that monumental events did not have to occur for me to gain insights into my participants' lives. It was also in their everyday events—in the minutiae of their behaviours; in their interactions with others; in their feelings about school, teaching, and learning; and in the ways they viewed their past experiences—that I could gain insight into their myriad experiences of school. I

was aware that like Emily Carr's reference to the English sweets called *Hundreds and Thousands*, which are "so small that separately they are not worth eating," (cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 104) many times, ostensibly insignificant events, individually, are "so small" they are not worth considering, but when placed next to other ostensibly insignificant events may form patterns that point to something larger or deeper. Carr is lyrical:

It was these tiny things that, collectively taught me how to live. Too insignificant to have been considered individually, but like the Hundreds and Thousands lapped up and sticking to our moist tongues, the little scraps and nothingnesses of my life have made a definite pattern. (p. 104)

Certainly during my yearlong study, I came across many *Hundreds and Thousands* that when I placed together have helped illuminate many of the themes I have examined in this dissertation. I have also been fortunate to experience, however, a few dramatic events that have helped deepen and even problematize this research. Two of these events I recounted in earlier chapters: the slitting of the throat gesture and the fire alarm debacle. Perhaps the most dramatic of the events I witnessed was the incident of the grade twelve winter formal. The winter formal not only became the sole topic of discussion for everyone attending Montclair for a couple of weeks after the incident occurred, but also became another school embarrassment in the already long litany of violent and delinquent incidents that are recorded in the annals of the school's unfortunate social history. The school winter formal is an annual formal dinner and dance celebration for the graduating class to reminisce about their experiences in high school and to wish each other good luck for the future. Unlike the grade twelve graduation dinner and dance, this event was a student-directed event—albeit with educator support and supervision—catering to the students' *dernier cri*. Occasionally, from year to year, a funny, quirky, or undisciplined

incident may have characterized or even immortalized that specific year's celebration; however, never in the school's recent history, has Montclair High experienced the embarrassment and public rebuke it suffered at this year's winter formal.

Below, I recount the winter formal from four different perspectives. Jas offers the first perspective; he is also one of the hardcore Brown boys who features prominently in the story's *sujet*. Jennifer, a grade eleven female student from a European heritage, who volunteered, as a ticket collector at the winter formal, shares her perspectives in an interview excerpt with me. In the third narrative, Selina, a South Asian female student and a friend of Jas, recounts her experience. Lastly, Adele, a self-identified Filipino student, shares her thoughts of the winter formal with me.

Jas

Selina sure messed things up last night: She brought her Surrey Jack boyfriend to our school's winter formal! She was supposed to go with me; I asked her out months back. She was going to wear the red dress that Rihanna wore at the Grammys and I would look like Chris Brown. I wasn't sure how Rihanna's red dress would look on her skin but when she painted what we would look like on her easel, I thought, for sure, the two of us would win the prize for the two best dressed. My nose in her paintings was always smaller, exactly the way I imagined it to be. I was always taller too.

Parm called me as I was getting into my truck after an unusually busy Saturday evening shift at the Shell gas station on 12th Ave. My usual Saturday afternoon shift at the Shell on Queens Way was never as busy; I always had time to wax my truck before I picked up the guys and headed over to Beach point park with a cooler full of Molson's. Because gas was cheaper by three cents, everyone that day decided to line up —waste

what was already in their tank—to save a few stupid coins. I couldn't say “no” to my boss who asked me a favor to cover for someone who was sick. Even though he is a bit of a pincher³⁸, he treats me alright; he gives me extra shifts whenever I need cash for my truck.

“Nav just saw Selina with a Surrey jack at Nando's.”

“So?” I cracked my knuckle.

“Dude, she cheatin' on you. Nav's gal knows him and told him that Selina's been with this Surrey druggie since last January. She's been two timing you, man.”

I almost hit a parked car as I screeched out of the Shell.

Selina didn't deny anything. “You were never my guy Jas; you never asked me out. We were friends but we weren't together. Asking me to the winter formal doesn't mean you own me!”

That's when I threw my slurpee at her in the school rotunda. Although my crew, who was behind me, started to hoot with laughter, I was mad; how could she do this to me.

I didn't want to go to the winter formal anymore. My crew was stunned. To change my mind, they told me they were going to get some special stuff so that I wouldn't even remember Selina. Parm had used his contacts so that we could have a winter formal that we would all never forget. He said to me a couple of hours before the winter formal:

“Life's hardcore, dude. Wipe it clean. Bitches 'l always stab you, that's just the way they're made. Don't stress, just have a pimpin' time and you know she'll be jealous.

Show her up dude, just show her up.”

³⁸ Tightwad

I blocked Parm out until I heard him say that Selina would probably show with her Surrey jack. I wanted to see this guy she'd been with all this time. More than anything—although I didn't want to admit it—I wanted to see Selina. No way was she going to be there and think I didn't show. No way was she going to show me up.

When we arrived at the country club, Sukh found the yellow Do not enter: Washroom closed for cleaning sandwich board. He had a knack of knowing exactly where to look. We now had our privacy. Kal was already shitfaced and Parm was well on his way to being wasted. Kal had downed a six pack; Parm had railed a line of coke. Parm began cutting me a line. He knew I was a bit freaked so he assured me that with one snort all would be good. I knew all wouldn't be good. Something was going down and I knew it.

The crew was inquant³⁹ as I continued sneezing after my first ever inhale; that's when Nav ran into the washroom screaming: "Those fuckin' Surrey jacks just pulled up in their Hummer. There's seven of 'em billies⁴⁰. Hey Jas, your bitch⁴¹ 'iz all decked out in the front seat! She's totally smokin⁴², dude."

Although my memory is now a bit foggy and I don't recall much that happened after, I do remember the dagger of Nav's last few words. Red dressed Selina in a Hummer! A latch snapped. A rabid serpent began to uncoil. I climbed atop of a toilet and started to howl. Not even your friends, let alone the police, can stop you from cocaine invincibility combined with pented up rage. "Let's get those douchebags," Nav trumpeted. I sprang from the toilet and landed, to my surprise, with my fist through a

³⁹ Fatigued to the point of incessant laughter

⁴⁰ Short for Hillbillies

⁴¹ Girl

⁴² Beautiful

wall. I snatched a glimpse of my curved faced reflecting off the shiny silver hand dryer, which was to the left of the tunnel I had just made with my arm. I pulled my hand through the drywall and punctured wall paper; loose gyprock pieces fell to the floor. That blurred crescent reflection of my face was how I imagined I looked for the rest of the night.

Several days later, hanging up my clothes in my closet, I was relieved that it was gyprock dust on my pant leg that I brushed off and not coke.

Jennifer

Jennifer: I think some teachers perceive the Brown boys as somewhat troublesome; like this winter formal that we just had. I was there and we kind of started [the formal] late, which was kind of bad. It was ok in the beginning but then suddenly some people started cocaine in the back; someone punched a hole in the guys' washroom. It was the Browns. They took a coat hanger or something and started chasing a car; I don't really know the details of what happened outside. The formal ended early because something like that had never happened before. This was the worst thing had happened to our school in terms of perception.

Anish: Do you mind telling me what you saw?

Jennifer: No I don't mind. I was there as a volunteer checking all the tickets as people walked in. About 250 people had come in before the incident happened. Some extra people had come and they said to Kevin—who was the youth leader and organizer of the event at the hotel—we will bomb you if you don't allow us in. They didn't have tickets and I am not sure if Kevin let them in. Anyway, two hours into it, the dancing had started and people had eaten. People who were graduating together were having one last fun together. Then we heard that there was a hole in the wall and people who were running the place wanted our school to leave. Kevin asked if we should shut the formal down and they (the golf club personnel) reconsidered and said since it was a small hole and because our school had been coming for a while, "No, you don't have to leave." Nobody had seen the hole and no one was going to fess up to it but everyone assumed that it was the Brown group. The whole school had heard that there was going to be fight at the formal. Apparently, there is a rift between them and Surrey. I know the girl and she came with her boyfriend, who is part of the rival gang in surrey. They [rival group] came by, and everyone got angry about that.

Some people were smoking cocaine out back; nobody could do anything about that. The owners or Kevin called the police but by the time the police came they couldn't find anything. I heard that the police were super pissed for calling them.

All the grade twelves were really angry. It was \$75 for the dinner and dance and they only got forty-five minutes to dance. You definitely heard about it the first day back at school. No one talked about anything else. Everyone in the whole school knew, even the grade eights. There wasn't any class work done. I know that Mr. C. had heard about it all day and said, "I don't want to know about it anymore!"

Selina

I'm a party girl. I'm also a quiet girl. Most of the time, I am in noise. Dance noise. Painting noise. Truck noise. MSN noise. It's where I want to be. It's where I can hear my own thoughts clearer. When I'm not in noise, however, I dream of working with deaf children. One day, I'm going to open up my own daycare for deaf children.

For some reason, my friends and I are called Surrey girls. Surrey girls have a bad name; they're known as sluts and whores and stuff. Honestly, I don't know how we got that name but it all started before the winter formal when we were at a table with a couple of Brown boys having lunch. Before I could blink, I was wearing a slurpee. One of the Brown boys accused me of wanting to bring a Surrey jack to the formal. If I did, he threatened, "all of you are going to be stomped on." I hate threats. If you are going to do something don't talk about it, just do it. Threats, like dads, are gutless.

At first, I had planned to go to the winter formal; I had even picked out my dress. It would be "titian" red after the Italian Renaissance painter, Titian, who experimented with wild colors, like I do in my paintings. He used that same shade of red in one of my favorite paintings, The Assumption of the Virgin. My boyfriend, Sarge, however, didn't want to go; he said that it would be lame just like his graduation was a couple of years ago. "It's all hype Selina," he tried to convince me, "they feed you White shit like macaroni salad and play ballroom crap so that you fall asleep on the dance floor. I'll take you and our crew to a club instead; you'll totally have a better time." I agreed

reluctantly, but another part of me really wanted to be with my school crew for one last time.

On the way to the club, I convinced Sarge to stop by the country club. I told him that I wanted to show up my school crew, especially the Brown boys. In reality, I wanted to see what I was missing. Sarge liked the idea but, like always, showed me attitude. Driving his brother's Hummer like he was pissed off, Sarge intentionally and dramatically pulled up on the sidewalk outside the country club. All heads turned. We were on the red carpet at the Grammys. The security guards, however, didn't run over to open our doors but to warn us away. Soon they were screaming over top of old-school Dre⁴³ that Sarge laughingly kept turning up. That's when things turned ugly. Jas, Nav, and their crew heard we were there and showed up dropping f-bombs and hurling rocks. All that happened next, I remember, in slow motion with no volume. An ultra-violent scene in a Van Damme movie. I can't lie; I got right into the hype. I got out of the window yelling and screaming back. I totally went psycho. Jas started to run toward us holding a flower vase or something. The security guards were banging on the hood yelling they had called the police. That's when Sarge jetted out of there.

Adele

Adele: Me and my friends went to the winter formal at 9pm and got kicked out an hour and a half later. Someone punched a hole in the boys' bathroom. I know who it was; I think he was getting ready for a fight with a Surrey jack—they call Surrey jacks Brown people.

Anish: Jack means boy?

Adele: Boys, in general. Those people were going to come and have a fight with the Montclair Brown boys. I guess the Brown guys were getting ready for the fight and got so mad that one of them punched the wall; he wanted to look like a "toughie." The people in the country club said, "If you guys do it again, you'll be kicked out."

⁴³ Dr. Dre: a rapper, particularly noted for his popularization of gangsta rap.

I saw there were people who wanted to get in when they weren't invited. They didn't really check our tickets so anyone could really walk behind and get in. So many people who were drunk got in no problems. People even brought cocaine. Everyone knows it was the Brown guys. The drunk ones were Browns and others. I admit that I drank too.

The country club personnel got fed up and after our second warning kicked us out. When they made their first warning, they stopped the music and announced, "Someone punched a hole in the wall in the bathroom and if this happens one more time, we will have to shut down the event." The police came; they were called by the country club people. They said that people were being too rowdy. It was a bummer because we paid 50 bucks and the food sucked.

[Adele stopped talking. I didn't fill in the dead space initially thinking that she may need some time to process. She, however, looked at me to indicate that "I'm done—ask me a question." Not knowing how or what she was feeling, I asked her a light question.]

Anish: What did they serve?

Adele: Roast beef, pasta salad, and stuff like that, all buffet style.

Anish: How were most of your peers dressed?

Adele: The guys were in suits or tuxes. The girls wore dresses, mostly sleek, silky, and sparkly ones.

Anish: And the music?

Adele: R&B, Rap, Usher, Blige, Runaway love, stuff like that.

Anish: The cops came and then what happened?

Adele: I left with my friends and we went to McDonalds. My friend was drunk and we told her not to drive. My guy friend drove to McDonalds and we waited there until she sobered up.

Anish: You guys drank before coming?

Adele: Yeah. We drank in the car. We also brought it in. They didn't check. Most of us were sobering up so we had to bring it in. It was so boring—but not to say that we need drugs and booze to have fun—that's how bad it was. No one checked. I was scared when my friends brought it in but my date just brought it in his tuxedo suit.

When I came back to school, everyone was talking about it. They were saying: “Oh my god, stupid Brown people. They did this and that and ruined it for everyone!” We paid fifty dollars⁴⁴ and it was a waste. I went to work and there was this girl from our school who organizes these kinds of things—I guess she is part of student council—and she was telling me that she and others went to tell the principal that it wasn’t fair what happened and that we should be allowed to have another one maybe in our school rotunda. No way that will happen though.

There are particular moments, events, or places when the stories of Others are re-told over and over again; when the identities of Others are fashioned and re-fashioned through these many tellings; and when those who are telling and re-telling these stories believe, as fact, that the Others, who they are storying, cannot be any other way. I call this process *narrative condensation*, that is, a process that describes how identities are constructed or positioned through the act of storying during significant or symbolic moments, events, or places. During narrative condensation, the positioning of Others that occurs through the act of storying today becomes the identities we recognize tomorrow. The winter formal can be described as a narrative condensation. It became a moment, an experience, and a place where the stories of the Brown boys were told and re-told, their identities fashioned and re-fashioned, and when those who were telling these stories believed, as fact, that the Brown boys, whom they had positioned, were undeniably that way. Once again, in this narrative condensation of the winter formal, the violent, criminal, and pathological identity of the Brown boy at Montclair High was affirmed. The spectre of the violent essentialist identity of the Indo-Canadian male was, once again, invoked and through this narrative condensation of the winter formal the outlaw, druggie, and miscreant identities of the Brown boys at Montclair were entrenched ever so deeper.

⁴⁴ Oddly, the cost of the function as recalled by the different participants varied from fifty dollars to seventy-five dollars. The ticket price, according to the sponsor teacher assisting with the function, was fifty dollars.

During those several days, when the only topic of conversation at Montclair High was the winter formal, I, too, engaged intensely in the dialogues. I heard over and over again the many ways in which the Brown boys were blamed. The stories travelled through a hall of mirrors in their tellings, elongated here and distorted there, until finally the only common denominator left in most of the tellings was, as a White female student distilled: “those stupid, selfish Brown guys ruined our winter formal and like always flushed our school rep down the sewer.”

It was not until I was speaking to three South Asian students, Kal, Giaan, and Priya in the school rotunda during lunch time that I asked myself, unequivocally, at what point will these Brown boys take responsibility for their actions? The two boys, Kal and Giaan were not any of the principles involved in the violence but were certainly present in the melee. Priya, was a grade twelve student who, with her close friends, attended the winter formal as a group. She was not involved at all in the violence of the winter formal of that event. I later found out that she was the sister of Nav, who belonged to Jas and Tej’s group of hardcore boys. As he was sharing his perceptions of the winter formal, Giaan dropped the “R bomb.”

Giaan: They were racist

Anish: [I intervened] Who were racist?

Giaan: The guys at the country club. That’s why they scorched the winter formal.

Anish: [taken aback] Are you saying that the owners or supervisors at the country club are racist because they shut down a party that got out of hand?

Giaan: If a bunch of White guys caused the problem they would’ve called the cops but continued with the show.

Anish [Incredulous] How can you call the country club officials racist when it was you guys who started this commotion?

Giaan: Silence.

Anish: [Not biting my tongue] When are you guys going to take responsibility for your actions?

Giaan: It's not like that.

Anish: It's not like what?

Giaan: Silence.

Anish: C'mon Giaan, was it really the people at the country club's fault? What about you guys? How much of all that were your guys' fault?

Priya: [who up until then was virtually silent]: You guys should be blamed for starting the whole winter formal experience. You and your crew started it. You guys brought a lot of drugs so you knew what you were doing.

I could not see the Brown boys as pathologized any longer. Certainly, their behaviours were not criminalized any more than they deserved to be. The Brown boys were engaging in violent and criminal behaviours and they, as the justice we have constructed demands, should account and atone for their actions. What I saw in the heuristic of the winter formal was a poignant example of the Brown boys unwilling to accept responsibility and freely admit to their wrongdoings. My re-appraisal and judgment of the Brown boys

Priya looked Giaan in the eyes when she made that comment. She then made eye contact with her group of friends who were chatting at the entrance of the rotunda and waved them over. What occurred next was extremely fortuitous for this study. Five other South Asian girls joined the conversation, which prompted two other Brown boys to strut over to where we were all standing. Priya did not apprise the new guests of our conversation. She simply continued:

It may not be you guys but some of the Brown guys hit girls too in school; not all the time but sometimes. It's like you all start it but don't own it.

only intensified after I experienced, days later, the following.

Mo failed to keep yet another appointment with me. This was the fourth. On each occasion, I had scheduled a time that was convenient for him. The first no show was during his study block. I waited forty minutes for him. When I saw him in class the next day, he simply shrugged an *I forgot*. The second no show was at lunch; a time that he had suggested. After waiting for five minutes for him, I asked the secretary to page him on the school PA. He did not appear. When I saw him in class the next day, he offered me a reason: "I was hungry so I went out with my crew to grab something to eat." Still no sorry. The third no show was the very next day. This time, I only waited ten minutes before leaving.

Why would today be any different, I caught myself saying. To accommodate his suggestion to meet after school for our interview, I had had to reconfigure my

The others who joined in late did not flinch. The transition was seamless; it was as though they had been participating in our conversation from afar. Priya's oozing confidence and possibly, some past hurt or anger, coloured the atmosphere; it was this air that we all breathed. Her self-assurance infected the other girls but fortunately or unfortunately censored the boys. Sensing this impromptu gathering could lead to something special, I made explicit to everyone that, if there were no objections, I would make notes.

Priya continued:

Like yesterday, one of my friends did get it [recipient of the Brown boys violence]. I think he's one of your new crew (looking at Giaan), comes over to her and says: "did you prank call me last night?" She says: "I don't even know you; I don't even have your number." But he just started hitting her, and pushing her. [looks at me] I tried to stop him and he started to push me. We told the principal and he is now dealing with it. He just pushed her and she went flying back. She was shocked too. She doesn't even know him. [Looks at the boys] See, it's like that; you and your crew just have a chip on your shoulders but don't want to admit it. You guys don't take responsibility and ruin it for all of us.

entire family life. With limited times to interview students—class times for obvious reasons were never an option—I could not give up this opportunity to meet with Mo.

It is said that prejudice that is vehemently denied sometimes finds release in the small creases of irritation. I was certainly irritated. Futilely waiting for Mo, for the third time in four days, released memories that I had up until then remembered very differently. Walking from the parkade to a pre-service teacher education class I was teaching at the University of British Columbia, I paused to lend a hand to a couple of guys who were having a difficult time driving their monstrosity under a height restriction bar that had come undone. Unwilling to adjust the bar themselves, the two UBC students persisted to drive under it until the bar would lodge into their Hummer's roof flood light, which prompted them to back up and try again. With each failed attempt,

Some of the other girls joined in and shared some of their stories that depicted the Brown boys as callous and delinquent thugs. For the most part, however, it was Priya who spoke and her friends who nodded. Her goal seemed to want the Brown boys, who were assembled in our group, to take responsibility for their actions. My incredulousness at Giaan's accusation of the country club staff being racist and my subsequent question to him seemed to unleash something intrepid in Priya. Having obviously thought much about these issues, which I confirmed later in a formal interview with her, Priya was passionate and ruthlessly forthright.

Unfortunately, the bell ended lunch and our conversation. Desperately wanting the conversation to continue, I suggested to everyone that I would ask permission from the administration to grant late slips for those who wanted to stay and continue speaking with me. The Brown boys, who seemed to want to bolt from the moment the conversation began, did just that, stating "they had to go." The moral

rolled a bolder of profanity. Sensing their frustration, I backtracked slightly, stood on my toes and nudged the bar upward so they could drive through. Both guys chose to ignore my small gesture. They chose to pretend that I was not there. Instead, they sped into the parkade leaving behind a frenetic pulse of hip hop that shook the pavement under the Hummer. Raised never to seek recognition for service—whether big or small—I filed away the incident in my mind under *ungrateful adolescents*.

rectitude the girls were assaying, that had exerted its enchanting influence on everyone had suddenly evaporated. Sensing this, everyone left as quickly as they came. In the following three weeks, I twice attempted to reconvene this group of students to continue our conversation, but both attempts failed. Perhaps the mirror the girls had conjured up for us all to peer into was too frightening—even for themselves. Only Priya and three of her friends agreed to a formal one-on-one interview with me.

As I packed away my digital recorder for the third time without Jas's stories in its memory, I realized I was angry at the two boys in the Hummer. As the two incidents—Jas's no show and the two boys' lack of acknowledgment of me—wove together their loose narrative threads in my mind, I felt wistful and retrospective. It was not so much that the two boys were ungrateful, but more that they were self-absorbed. It was not so much that they were unaware, but more that they did not care to be aware. It was not so much that the *three* boys were indulgent, but more that they believed everyone owed them.

It was similar to the time I was at McDonalds with my son. And another time at a line-up in a grocery store. When informed by the cashier of the cost of the meal at McDonalds and the cost of the can of pop and potato chips at the grocery store, the two

different sets of boys performed the same act; they threw a handful of change on the counter indignantly and chortled malevolently as the cashier, in both cases, scrambled to block the coins from rolling off the counter. Like the boys in the Hummer, both sets of boys at McDonalds and the grocery store did not care to be aware of anyone around them; they simply revelled in their impudence. They expected that the cashiers owed them a service. The cashier at McDonalds paused in that brief moment and watched the coins bounce on the countertop—in what seemed to be in slow motion—before flailing her limbs and body to shield the change from falling on the ground. Eyebrows furrowed into the shape of disdain, she pursed her lip tighter, maintained her glance downwards, and waited for the boys to leave with their order. On the other hand, the grocery store cashier, stone faced and emotionally disengaged, methodically picked up the change in a manner that seemed to say: *I, too, see you both as ciphers. Here is your receipt; our transaction is over.*

All of the boys in these incidents were Brown. This fact in my new imagining was not new. What was new, however, was how differently I saw them this time. Through a lens that had newly been coloured by Mo's no shows, I saw Mo becoming each one of those boys. Insolent. Too self-indulgent to be aware. Throwing change at cashiers. Very soon, driving a Hummer away from civility toward entitlement. The condemnations of the Brown boys at Montclair High School by many of the educators and students now took on a different significance for me. Their claims that, up until now, for me lay in the shadows of skepticalness, began to re-emerge, cast in a new light of credulity. The teachers' incessant complaints of the Brown boys' tardiness, insolence, and ignobility felt sickly true. Perhaps these boys were exactly the way that the teachers had described.

Perhaps they deserved expulsions from school at rates that were disproportionately high. Perhaps the boys' repeated low academic achievement records were bona fide consequences of their indolence and lack of resilience. I was paralyzed with guilt for feeling and thinking all of these thoughts, especially after recalling the many Brown boys' cries and pleas of fairness and justice. Nevertheless, for weeks henceforth, I could not help but see the Brown boys in this way.

Seeking Confirmation From the South Asian Teachers

I decided to visit the South Asian teachers in the school to discuss these feelings and thoughts. My conversation with them, however, only intensified the storm in my mind. In my interview excerpt below, Amrit shares with me her thoughts specifically about the winter formal:

Anish: What do you know about the winter formal event?

Amrit: There was already drugs and alcohol on site. Some of these boys were already under the influence of drugs, cocaine, and alcohol. The Brown boys were that is, I'm sure you have heard by now. The rest of the events that happened were spurred on by the Brown boys.

Anish: What kind of impression did it leave with the staff?

Amrit: What I heard was that some staff members were concerned about the security that night and why the administration was not as heavily involved with the organization of that night since it was our kids from our school—even though it was off-site. The administration, since this happened, has done what they [sic] could after our staff meeting. I don't think there will be any future dances and the perception is it is because of the Brown kids. I mean, it *did* [emphasizes] start with them; they were the ones who brought the drugs and alcohol. Last year at grad, they came to the dinner and dance drunk. These kids weren't even allowed to come into the dance. It's really sad but whenever it comes to drugs and alcohol, it seems that Brown boys are always involved.

Preeti, the very next day, shared with me, in a long excerpt from an interview transcript, her remarkable experiences she has had with the Brown boys.

[Just before this exchange, I had shared with Preeti my reaction to Giaan's comment about the country club personal being racist].

Preeti: I am not surprised. From my experience, they [Brown boys] don't take responsibility until they are made or forced to. Let me tell you, in the last five years of teaching at this school, I have had my car vandalized by the Brown boys. I have had my portable vandalized by Brown boys. I have had my house vandalized by Brown boys. Vandalizing my house happened after my second year of teaching. My first two years in particular were very tough.

Anish: Tell me about these incidents if you do not mind.

Preeti: When my property was damaged, it was Halloween. The next day, I came to school and started to do my own investigation. A lot of things were being said so I and other Brown kids who were helping me with all this, kept a close eye and ear on the situation. We were listening and asking around for all sorts of clues. The admin got involved right away. The cops got involved. Within due time, we had narrowed the list of suspects down. The kids whom we suspected, had a long rap sheet with the admin. They were even expelled from school a couple of times.

I thought I would do something different. I had meetings with these boys' parents. My husband and I sat down in a round table with each one of them. It was in the library and an admin was also there with us. My husband and I sat there and I voiced to them that as a South Asian female, these students, their kids, had tried to intimidate me. I even told them that I felt that the boys were trying to intimidate me because I was, according to them, coming on too strict to them. I was supposedly, "a mean teacher." I told the parents that many of them had said to me: "we aren't coming here to learn. Come on, it's only Punjabi [the course]." Remember, all the parents whose kids had done this were there.

Anish: What was their reaction? How did they take all this?

Preeti: Very well. Some parents were embarrassed and crying and saying that we had no idea: "please don't blame us." We, of course, weren't there to blame them. My husband and I were there to share with them our experience, disappointment, and shock. The Brown community—I am using the term Brown because the kids, as you know, use it today—were shocked too. Basically, they voiced that "how can our boys treat a Brown teacher with such a lack of respect. The parents were very supportive. What was supposed to happen was that after this meeting, we were all supposed to get together with their kids. But unfortunately, my dad passed away and so I wasn't in the head space to do that. The vandalism, although it was violating, just became trivial after my dad died.

[Later on in the interview]

Anish: How did the admin react to this whole situation? Did they continue communication with these parents?

Preeti: You know, they didn't. But they were very supportive. You know, so many of these boys had had so many chances beforehand and they hadn't realized that to what extent these guys would go to. I think they learned that communication with these boys' parents—all parents really—is essential. But unfortunately, they didn't follow up.

Anish: What does that tell you?

Preeti: [Surprised that I followed up with another question. Laughs] Sometimes, leading is just about stamping fires out. I suppose if the admin were really serious about bridge building with the community, discussing issues with them, working in partnership with them, helping the Brown boys do better in school, et cetera, et cetera, they would have followed up. [Long silence]. It also tells me that I handled the situation very appropriately. It also tells me that they [Brown boys] realized that “we didn't intimidate her.” We weren't able to bully her, so to speak. I realized that unfortunately the parents don't visit us at school that often because of the language issue or whatever, but if we had a stronger connection with the community, you know with the parents, I think there is a lot of opportunity there to make some really good changes or improvements, or move forward in the right direction with kids. The minute I brought things up with the parents, things changed. All of a sudden, the kids changed. I hate to say the word, but the kids were scared. Scared that there would be consequences. They feared authority but that authority has to be connected from [to] home. They began to respect me—because I had involved the community and the school together—and that had not happened before.

Anish: So right now, there isn't—at least from what I have heard—too much staff and community relations, right?

Preeti: No. Not to the parents of the students we need to focus on. Now, there are community members who do come in but their kids are getting 90 % and over. Many of them are from other South Asian communities or ones that have just recently arrived here from India. You know the ones you really want to see, no, they aren't coming in. We, as a school, are not making any effort or interaction with them.

I always knew that Montclair High School, as a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, had in its orbit many complex and interconnected layers of narratives; however, the layers I thought I had so many times taken apart, to what I believed was the core, were in no way complete and, in fact, required much more meticulous and nuanced

unravelling. I will share these thoughts, especially the juxtaposition of my firm claims of pathologizing of the Brown boys with my newer claim of the complicity of the Brown boys in the concluding chapter. In other words, in the final chapter of this dissertation, I will attempt to reconcile the ostensibly contradictory claims I have made of educators pathologizing the Brown boys behaviours and attitudes with this new claim that the Brown boys are indeed complicit in this pathologizing. In the remainder of the chapter, however, I continue to examine the manner in which the Brown boys are complicit in the pathologizing of their own identities.

Seeking Validation

Having accepted that the participants of the impromptu lunch meeting were not interested in reuniting, I decided to contact all the participants for individual interviews. Perhaps, I speculated, the private and confidential setting of our conversations would allay any hesitations or fears they may have thought would arise in a social setting. Only Priya and two other South Asian female students consented. And only Kal, one of the Brown boys, consented to meet with me. The intention of my interview with the participants whom I had already interviewed—Priya and Kal—was to explore further their perspectives on the complicity of the Brown boys. For the two new South Asian female participants, Mehar and Namrita, I started their interviews by first asking them to share with me their schooling experiences. Only when I had asked them most of the questions delineated in Appendix 1, did I inquire further into their thoughts on the complicity of the Brown boys.

Priya continued from where she had left off. She spent the majority of this interview, which lasted approximately forty-five minutes, reiterating her fervent belief

that the Brown boys had to take responsibility for their actions. She, too, theorized that because of the Brown boys coddled home lifestyle, they had learned to deflect blame and responsibility onto everyone else except themselves. Although she made no excuses for the Brown boys' actions, she did state repeatedly and apologetically—unlike during the impromptu meeting—that the surveillance, consequences, and blame that *all* the Brown boys received from the educators were undeserved and “over the top.”

The Brown guys are the ones who do most of the stuff. Look at the example of the guy who put a firecracker in the toilet and it blew up; that was a Brown guy. No one else did that. All the stuff that has happened, like fights and stuff—that you see on you tube—they were done by Brown guys but I don't think it's fair that when any bad thing happens, they [teachers] go there to the Brown guys first and blame them. I can see why they think that but I don't think it is fair. You can also see why the Brown guys are so pissed and continue with stuff like fight.

Given that this was a perspective that she had not shared with me yet, I pushed for a deeper understanding. Not unlike all the other Brown boys and South Asian males and females students I have represented throughout this dissertation, Priya believed that *all* the South Asians were unduly targeted and pathologized for the actions of a “few bad apples.”

Perhaps Priya's most insightful contribution during this second interview was her revelation of a few Brown boys she knows, who asked their teacher to lower their marks so they would not stand out from others in their crew. Priya in her own words:

Priya: Mr. Crosby, said that one Brown guy came up to him and asked him to change his mark to a lower mark because he was getting an “A” and his friends all knew his student number and he didn't want his friends to know what he was actually getting.

Anish: Really!?

Priya: Yeah, it's true. [She interpreted my “really” as scepticism instead of incredulity that I was actually feeling]

Anish: Oh, I believe you Priya, it's just that I am surprised.

Priya: [Half smiles in acknowledgment] I was in his class; he was getting a 90% and when Crosby basically laughed at him [for asking to have his marks lowered], he purposely started to do bad on the tests so his marks would go down.

Anish: What do you think doing badly on purpose is about?

Priya: They think it is cool to have low marks. You know, he isn't the only one; I have seen it at other times too. You don't know what is going through their heads but I have seen them and they want low marks.

Priya's friend, Namrita, who was also present at the impromptu lunch meeting but not very vocal at that time, elaborated on this same story during my interview with her.

Anish: Someone mentioned to me something about some Brown boys wanting lower marks—have you heard or do you know anything about this?

Namrita: There was a story Mr. Crosby told my class that this kid wanted him to change his marks so that he could be known as dumb so he could still hang with his Brown crew. What I don't get is if they are your friends, who cares what marks they get; if they are your friends, they are your friends. They are not your friends if they want you to do bad.

Anish: Why do they want bad marks?

Namrita: I think if you have a good mark, it's like a weakness and no one wants a weakness pointed out to them in a group. So to cover up, they just get bad marks and then they don't have to stand out.

Anish: So getting high marks is a weakness?

Namrita: Yes, otherwise they [the boys' crew] will poke fun at you. In a group of dumb people, which I am sorry to say many Brown guys are, anything that will make you stand out isn't good.

Both Priya and Namrita claim they have friends within the Brown boy crew who purposely attempt to sabotage their own academic performance in order not to stand out amongst their group of friends. In other words, according to Priya and Namrita, some Brown boys have requested a few of their teachers, such as Mr. Crosby, to lower their

marks so that their high test scores do not make them particularly visible within their group of friends. Should their crew find out of their academic successes, the two girls submit, the boys would be seen as “weak.” In a group of dumb guys, intelligence, perversely, is positioned as a weakness. Both Priya and Namrita intimated that the Brown boys wore low performance as a badge. This badge, among other reasons, certainly exasperated and chafed the teachers.

To gain a deeper and perhaps even a different perspective on this issue of mark sabotaging, I requested an interview with Mr. Crosby, who both Priya and Namrita mentioned was an integral character in this story. Unfortunately, for reasons I do not understand, Mr. Crosby declined my request. In the interviews I still had remaining with the educators and educational leaders of the school, I did raise this issue of the Brown boys “wanting lower marks”; fortunately, two of the five teachers acknowledged that they too had heard this story and believed the accounts that were conveyed to me were, indeed, representative of how they saw the issue. One of the two teachers, Parker, did mention that although he has never had a student ask for a lower mark, he believes that he has taught a few Brown boys in his class who have purposely not performed well and consequently, “have received poor marks, which I seriously think is their aim.” He appends: “They are more capable than they act. They won’t turn in any assignment or projects but when I try to engage them in class, it’s clear that some of them are wonderful thinkers but do not want to show it.”

After many months of intense analysis and reflection, I believe that one of the reasons that the Brown boys chose to do so poorly in school and chose to go against learning and achievement is because they want to show their teachers and others that it is

they who are in control of their own academic achievement. It is they who will determine their letter grades. If they want to do well, they could choose to do so. If they want to do poorly, it is no one's decision but their own. As a way to wrest power away from the educators, who, they know, determine their marks, the Brown boys purposely did poorly. To demonstrate to their teachers that they cared less about their power to judge and evaluate, the boys failed intentionally. In fact, it was they, the Brown boys, who possessed the power to determine their own academic performance. They chose to perform poorly. They, in an absurd way, "controlled" their own marks. And, oddly, they felt a sense of power when they realized that their baffled teachers felt impotent to do anything about it.

Undoubtedly, not all the Brown boys have the choice to do well. There are large numbers of Brown boys who legitimately struggle academically. I wonder, however, what it does for the psyche of these struggling students when the more academically inclined Brown boys choose to do poorly—who ask to have their marks lowered. I wonder if they sense a shift in power. If the sentiment that the Brown boys choose to do poorly is traded freely in the discourse at school, I wonder if the students who do require academic support, who do, for whatever reason, struggle at school are also seen, now, as possibly choosing to do poorly. I wonder also if the Brown boys who are ridiculed and who claim they are made to feel stupid use this supposed "choice" of doing poorly to feel less discouraged and more in control of how they are positioned and how they position themselves. In this scenario, teacher power, via marks, is neutralized given that the Brown boys choose not to even engage in the game of grades. I will continue with more data driven speculation in my final chapter.

Let me close this chapter, however, by returning once again to the characters who at the impromptu lunch meeting deepened my understanding of how the Brown boys are complicit in the construction of their own pathologized identities. Kal was more insightful in his second interview with me than his first, which I had conducted during the first few weeks of this study. His comments below do not require any foregrounding.

Priya's kinda got something on us. Some a [sic] the guys don't want to do good in school because they don't have to. Look at me, when I bring home a 60%, my mom says, "Oh that is ok; you're a guy; that is good for a guy. [Laughs heartily] I feel like I am getting away without trying hard. I never try hard because I can get away with it. [Continues to laugh because he can't believe he is sharing this, normally unspeakable information, so nonchalantly]

Kal admits that he does not have to try hard to receive good marks. His parents do not expect much from him because he is "a guy." He confesses that he could do better but, frankly, he does not have to. He could "get away with it" without experiencing any consequences that truly mattered to him in the present. When I asked Kal if he knew of anyone who purposely sabotaged his or her own marks or if he ever did this himself, he claimed defensively that he had never done such a thing, but the practice itself, although not uncommon, did occur from time to time.

You don't want to show up the other guys, especially your relatives. You don't want one mom bragging about his [her] son and another mom, who's like a relative, an aunt or something, carving up her son. That ain't cool.

Kal claims that his crew would not want to get outstanding marks because "you don't want to show up the other guys." Although he admitted that he and many of his friends do not experience pressure to do well from home, should someone get a high mark or receive some sort of academic distinction, it would start an unfortunate comparison game with family members. For Kal, this sort of family competition, where

parents place “heat” on their sons to score better on grades than others would not be “cool.”

Unfortunately, Kal did not want to engage in a conversation about the winter formal. He clearly knew my perspective from my outburst at the impromptu meeting and, perhaps, did not want to defend or explain his beliefs. Nevertheless, he did raise the issue that I examined briefly in Chapter 6 and that, more importantly, requires further investigation in a subsequent study.

I think everyone views us as bad and stuff for a reason. If something bad happens we are the ones that are doing it. That’s true sometime but not all the time that people think. It’s usually easier to be this way than to change history.

I asked Kal a few other clarifying questions that helped me better understand what he meant by “to be this way than to change history.” “History” for Kal and others, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, means the racism that their parents and their family members have experienced. For Kal “to change” the symbolic, emotional, or physical violence that his parents and community experienced in the past would be impossible. However, to inflict onto others that same kind of symbolic, emotional, or physical violence would “be easier” and even possible than to be able “to change history.” As I mentioned in Chapter 6, there was an unspoken understanding amongst these students, and Kal was yet another student who confirmed it to me, if any episodes of intimidation or bullying were going to occur in the school, the perpetrators would be the Brown boys. In their minds, they controlled the reins of power and would dictate the agenda of fear and intimidation in the school. The winter formal was one such example.

Clearly, these and other similar reasons that Kal and the other Brown boys proffer for justifying their intimidating, violent and criminal behaviours are entirely unacceptable

and unjust. To ensure schools are academically excellent, socially just, and democratic (Shields, 2002, 2007), these types of detestable attitudes, values, and behaviours cannot be legitimized let alone tolerated. However, it is critically important for researchers and educators to listen to and understand the logic—however convoluted and faulty it seems—that undergird student thinking. In this study, the Brown boys' *way of thinking*, however unacceptable, has a hidden logic that we, as educators and researcher, must attempt to listen to and understand if we are to work alongside them to offer alternate ways of seeing and doing. I revisit this point in the final chapter of this dissertation.

12. CONCLUSION

This has been a narrative inquiry. Unlike formalist studies, a narrative inquiry “is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; p. 42). That is, narrative inquiries do not necessarily translate into policy statements, action plans, or curricular applications; instead, when done well, they “offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42). In the same way, it is my hope that this narrative inquiry can offer for educators a new and different way of viewing, positioning, and understanding their South Asian students. By reading the storied lives of the participants that are juxtaposed with my interpretations, it is my hope that we, as educators and educational leaders, can confront our own biases and critique our current practices all the while considering and exploring new ways of relating to and working with our South Asian students. More specifically, by best representing the participants’ interpretations of their schooling experiences, it is my hope that this inquiry can offer new meanings and insights to all educators and educational leaders to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students and possibly even to mitigate the schooling factors that may exacerbate the disaffection of these South Asian male students. Should this inquiry inspire or actualize socially just, academically excellent (Shields, 2003, 2007), democratic (Greene, 1999) and caring (Noddings, 1992, 1999; Ware, 2006; Gay, 2000, 2002; Sheets and Gay, 1996) policies, applications and action plans to attend to the needs of all the disaffected South Asian students, I would consider my research endeavours worthwhile.

In this concluding chapter, I distil from this narrative inquiry—albeit in the reductionist ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that I foregrounded and explained in Chapter 3—insights and recommendations that could add to existing knowledge, ways of seeing, and ways of teaching and leading in schools. By succumbing to this tension, I recognize fully that I have to forfeit, to a great extent, the reflexive and narrative storied format that up until now have characterized this study's text. Precedence for this type of divergence, however, in a concluding chapter for a narrative study has been established (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; He, 1998). In addition to the consciousness raising applications and uses my readers can imagine on their own from reading this narrative study, I make explicit some learnings and recommendations that I hope will offer my readers to become more effective critical multicultural educators and transformative educational leaders.

Background and Overview of the Inquiry

I am a Canadian. I am also an immigrant South Asian male. As a member of the diverse web of South Asian communities and as an educator—earlier at a high school and recently, at a university—I have read, heard, and seen firsthand, in the last several years, that there is “something wrong” with South Asian adolescent male students in an increasing number of schools in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, British Columbia. I, too, was a South Asian adolescent male student in the Lower Mainland—one who managed to achieve academic success, despite experiencing harrowing episodes of racism and disabling poverty during my early phase of immigrant life. Given my crescent inquisitiveness about this spreading disquietude and that there are no reliable data or very minimal published research studies about the school achievement of South Asian

students, I began knitting together anecdotal information from colleagues, students, and community members; informal surveys as part of action-research projects conducted at various schools and Gurdwaras; and reports from think-tanks (Research Advisory Committee, 2003; Indo-Canadian Forum, 2002). When knitted, a pattern emerged that indicated there were, in fact, disturbing levels of academic failure and disaffection among South Asian adolescent male students. Hence, I decided to conduct a formal study which eventually gave birth to this dissertation.

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate how the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students may exacerbate or alleviate the problem of disaffection. Specifically, I wanted

1. To understand South Asian students' school experiences (including experiences of inclusion, marginalization, disaffection, success, and failure); and
2. To understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students.

To determine the theoretical constructs that would undergird the first objective of this inquiry, I made four assumptions. My first assumption is that how these South Asian male students are positioned by educators and other students and how they position themselves will shape how they interpret their schooling experiences. Hence, the literature I reviewed to explore this assumption examined how subjects are represented through discursive practices and how they are recruited and assigned positions and names. My second assumption was that identities have epistemic significance; in other words, how these South Asian male students understand themselves to be will have direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their worlds (Mohanty, 1995, 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006). I draw on elements of postpositivist realist

theory of identity to ground this assumption. My third assumption was that identity representation and construction occurs within a political and social landscape. Since multiculturalism in recent times has influenced the governance discourse (Fleras, 2009) for how identities are recognized (Taylor, 1994), retained, and expressed (Kymlicka, 1997), I reviewed three dominant variants of multiculturalism that individually or in combination have helped conceptualize how educators and educational leaders in schools position the identities of minoritized students. The final assumption I made in order to understand the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students was the inextricable link between identity and learning. The literature I reviewed argues that to decrease failure rates and improve academic success among minoritized students, educators and educational leaders must create curricular and pedagogical spaces in their schools for all students to speak from the knowledge and experiences that their identities provide (Cummins, 2002, 2001, 1997, 1996, 1995; Cummins, et al., 2005; Dei, 1996; Dei, Mazzuca, & Zine, 1997; Duncan-Andrade, 2005, 2006, 2007; Gay, 2002, 2000; Goldstein, 2007; Kincheloe, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 1995a, 1995b, 1994 ; Leistyna, 2007; Nasir and Hand, 2006; Nieto, 2000; Noddings, 1999; Wyngaard, 2007).

To achieve the second objective of this inquiry, I began with the assumption that an examination of the vision and structure of the educational leadership practiced in the school was necessary. Hence, I reviewed the literature of transformative educational leadership as a lens for this second examination (Shields, 2003, 2008, 2009).

Since student identities and experiences are at the heart of this inquiry, I needed to articulate a methodological approach that would best represent the research participants' rich storied lives. Dewey (1961, 1998), Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1994, 2000) and

others, claim that narrative is the ideal way of comprehending and representing experience. They posit that since experience happens narratively, it should be studied narratively. Hence, the methodological approach I articulated in this study draws on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space* framework. In this three-dimensional narrative space where I attempted to live for almost one year of the fieldwork, I aspired to conduct myself, at all times, in the Bakhtinian (1984) spirit of polyphonic dialogue and Andrade's (2005, 2006, 2007) ethic of *cariño*.

Findings

Inherent in the stories, discussion, and reflexivity throughout this dissertation, regardless of the multiplicity of themes and issues addressed in each of its chapters, has been an attempt to understand how the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students may exacerbate or alleviate the problem of disaffection. Undergirding this inquiry are the theoretical frameworks, which have not only provided me with the language and means of understanding, interpreting, and analyzing the data I collected, but they have also offered principles of how educators and educational leaders *should* position, relate, lead, and teach minoritized students. I will now recount the key findings of this study drawing on the principles of these theoretical frameworks that I identified and examined extensively in Chapter 2. Additionally, I will explore how the nexus point between the findings of this study and the principles of these frameworks—theory and practice—might open up for teachers, students, educational leaders, and South Asian community members new and different ways of mitigating the schooling factors that exacerbate the disaffection of the South Asian male students.

Question One

How did the educators and educational leaders understand and relate to their South Asian students? The key findings that address this question can be separated into three parts: The pathologization of disaffected South Asian males by (a) the criminalization of their behaviours; (b) deficit theorizing and (c) the insulation of the school from the South Asian communities and the inferiorization of the cultural capital these communities had to offer.

Pathologization by the Criminalization of the Brown Boys Behaviours

The non-South Asian educators, educational leaders, and students shared markedly different perspectives from the South Asian educators. Below, using subtitles, I summarize their perspectives separately.

Non-South Asian Educators', Educational Leaders', and Students' Perspectives

Every single non-South Asian student and non-South Asian teacher stated that the Brown boys convoked in numbers that far exceed what should be considered appropriate or “normal.” Their propensity for assembling in large groups—and dressed in a way that appropriated gang couture—was viewed not only as inherently deviant but indicated a predilection toward violent and criminal behaviours. It was generally believed that the Brown boys intentionally assembled in unwieldy “gang-like” numbers to send everyone who attended Montclair High School—both students and educators alike—a message that power resided with the Brown boys. The boys’ “imposing physical presence,” “invincible swagger,” and “sense of entitlement” were not only firmly embedded in the psyche of the teachers, but freely traded, as fact, in their conversations. Unfortunately, the Brown boys’ motivation and behaviours for congregating in large groups and dragooning were not read

by the educators and educational leaders as social actions worthy of understanding, dialogue, or perhaps even teaching; instead they were categorized by them as deviant or pathological worthy of rebuke, disdain and disproportionate discipline.

South Asian Educators' Perspectives

The South Asian teachers questioned the motives of their colleagues' reactions toward the Brown boys' desire to assemble in large groups. Some of them asserted that even though the Brown boys' assembled in large groups, the charge that they were intimidating was an exaggerated one and should be questioned for its intent. They speculated that this type of myth construction (Barthes, 1972) made it easier for their colleagues to convince the leadership to employ surveillance and disciplinary apparatuses that systematically disempowered the boys and ultimately coerced them into compliance. They claimed that instead of their colleagues addressing the challenging issues—such as convoking in large groups, dragooning, or engaging in recalcitrant behaviours—their colleagues choose to exacerbate the circumstances by complaining widely that the Brown boys were remorselessly defiant. Positioning the Brown boys in this invective way, they believed, made it easier for their colleagues to discontinue offering them support and assistance. Their colleagues' logic, after all, was: How does one teach and support a group of recalcitrant students who congratulate themselves in intimidating precisely the ones who want to help?

The interpretations of these findings are consistent with the pathologizing literature (Shields, et al., 2005) and the studies linking race, crime, and media (Ericson 1991; Goodey, 2001; Henry et. al. 1996; and Jiwani, 2006). Persistent and recurrent reporting of misbehaviours or crimes allegedly committed by a distinct minoritized group

often induces a faulty perception that every member that shares any kind of resemblance to this group has a predisposition to crime (Goodey, 2001). Moreover, repetitive reportage of such transgressions or crimes not only leads to a moral panic against these groups, but compels, often in the form of a public outcry, authorities to enact harsh surveillance and disciplinary measures to arrest or curb the perceived threats (Jiwani, 2006). Similarly, in this study, the construction of the essentialist South Asian male identity as violent and criminal within the public imagination was, “written on” (Bannerji, 2000) the identities of male South Asian students. Interpellated into this miscreant subject-position, the educators and educational leaders felt justified to engage in pathologizing discourses and compelled to use surveillance stratagems to stop or discourage further perceived threats.

Pathologization by Deficit Theorizing

Once again, the non-South Asian educators, educational leaders, and students shared markedly different perspectives—except where I make explicit—from the South Asian educators. Below, using subtitles, I summarize their perspectives separately.

Non-South Asian Educators, Educational Leaders, and Students’ Perspectives

The majority of the non-South Asian students and teachers saw the Brown boys through a deficit thinking lens. The willingness to openly discuss the Brown boys’ lack of intellectual ambition and abilities as though they were irrefutable facts revealed the deficit theorizing practices that were deeply embedded in the mindset and culture of Montclair High School. It was not uncommon to hear from the non-South Asian students, unsolicited, disparaging comments about the Brown boys’ academic abilities. A motif in their comments were that working hard, learning, wondering, and scoring well on exams

were very low on the Brown boys' priorities. Even majority of the teachers were brazen in their comments about the Brown boys' academic abilities.

Many reasons for the Brown boys' lack of academic success were theorized by *both* the non-South Asian educators and South Asian educators. The first most common reason was the "privileged" nature of these boys. The second was the family business that served, for the Brown boys, as a safety net. One of the main reasons that the Brown boys are disaffected and struggle academically is because of their sense of entitlement. They theorize that the coddled and pampered lifestyles of these Brown boys are shielding them from life's expected challenges and disappointments, which they believe are necessary for a "good and worthwhile life." That is, the Brown boys have not developed the necessary intestinal fortitude and life skills to capably respond to the vicissitudes of life. They lack the resilience required to overcome life's obstacles.

Joining the family business—which, in this study, was *always* characterized as a labourer's business—was the second compelling reason attributed to the Brown boys' lack of motivation and success in school. In other words, according to non-South Asian educators and South Asian educators, educational leaders, and students interviewed, the Brown boys lacked motivation to do well in school because, immediately after grade twelve, they saw themselves working in and eventually taking over their family businesses.

South Asian Educators' Perspectives

The South Asian teachers had altogether a different perspective than their colleagues. Even though they believed that the privileged lifestyle and the safety net of the family business are two major contributing factors to the Brown boys' lack of

academic success, they believed that their colleagues were complicit in the disaffection and failure of these boys. A South Asian teacher, in her heartfelt rebuke, captures the sentiments of the other South Asian teachers in the school:

I think *we* [raises her voice] are failing the kids. I think when my colleagues see these kids, they see failure. They see problems. They see trouble; they don't see these kids succeeding. It isn't in their realm of possibility. Why is that? Why do they see them like that? ... Why aren't we asking *why*? When we look at the Aboriginal problem, we always ask: Why? And we then put in the free education, etc... to support them, but what are we doing for [these] kids? I don't see anything out there; all I hear is that they need to be disciplined; they need to be expelled; they need to smarten up; they need to work harder; well it isn't changing the problem!

The South Asian teachers were clearly frustrated about their school's perception, treatment, and unjust actions toward the Brown boys. They believed that the school was failing these Brown boys. Although the school used all the right social justice, care, and reform vocabulary, their practices were at times draconian in nature aimed purposely at blaming the Brown boys. The South Asian teacher quoted above went further in her indictment of the school stating unequivocally that they were complicit in the disaffection and failure of these boys: "We are failing the kids." In fact, she was so clear and single minded about her convictions that she likened the school's pathologizing and oppressive practices to the outright racism that she and more so her father had experienced in a small town in British Columbia when they were much younger.

Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi (2005) claim "that when teachers create contexts for learning constructed within discourses that reject pathologizing and deficit thinking, all students—and especially minoritized students—will be able to achieve academic excellence" (p. 125-126). The findings in this study demonstrated that the majority of the educators and educational leaders, at Montclair High, did not create contexts for learning

that rejected pathologizing and deficit thinking. In fact, it was the opposite; they engaged in pathologizing practices that positioned the Brown boys as “lazy,” “unmotivated,” “academically disinterested,” and “truants.”

Equally important, not one of the non-South Asian educators in this study critically challenged the philosophies, practices, and policies of the school or the educational system. In fact, not one educator questioned the efficacy of his or her own teaching practices. According to them, the academic challenges experienced by the Brown boys were not the fault of the institution or the educators. The blame rested squarely on the shoulders of the Brown boys and their socio-cultural background. For them, the Brown boys were entirely responsible for their own predicament. Indeed, there was a flourish of theories that traded freely and uncritically among the non-South Asian and South Asian educators and students. The most prevalent was that there were some socio-cultural factors—specifically the privileged treatment of the male children and the unconditional safety net provided for all the male children to enter into the family business—that contribute to or even caused their academic woes at school. Although further investigation is required to determine the depth and breadth of this theory, this study recognizes that, to some degree, these socio-cultural factors *are* negatively influencing the schooling experiences of the Brown boys at Montclair High School. Nevertheless, to saddle entirely this burden onto the Brown boys and their families is pathologizing and unjust.

Insulation and Inferiorization

Even though over one third of the school population self-identified as South Asian and, as I elaborated in Chapter 4, over fifty percent of the entire South Asian population

of Rowling lived in the catchment area and adjacent catchment area of Montclair High School, the majority of the staff and leadership at the school not only insulated themselves from the South Asian communities, but many of them inferiorized and even pathologized the cultural capital that these communities had to offer. Two examples from this study—Punjabi evenings and the Punjabi course—illustrate this point well.

“Punjabi evenings,” sponsored and facilitated by a South Asian teacher for over five years, not only provided an opportunity for the parents of the South Asian students “to see the good things about their kids,” but broke down “the barrier ... the wall” that psychologically separated the parents from the school, which was identified as a major obstacle to overcome by the staff at Montclair High. Despite the success of these evenings and how much the South Asian students and community truly “loved” them, the staff and administration did not show any interest or rarely supported the event. In fact, according to the South Asian teachers at the school, other clubs—that comprised mostly White and Asian students—that performed for the school or the wider community, were consistently lauded by their colleagues and administration for their performances, talent, and community service. The “Punjabi evening,” however, lacked the cachet or eminence because it featured the South Asian students and community.

Additionally, according to the South Asian teachers, Punjabi—the elective language course—was deemed by the school language department and many of their colleagues as lowly. They surmised that the inferior status of the course was a result of, among other reasons, only Brown students registering in the course. Even the administration was not supportive of the course: According to the South Asian teachers, the administration had scheduled all the Punjabi courses, year after year, to be taught in a portable that was

remote to the school's main building. Despite being aware of the academic and behavioural challenges experienced by the Brown boys and that a large majority of these boys enrolled in the Punjabi course, by assigning the course to a portable outside the main school building, the administration continued to marginalize, physically and psychologically, these boys.

The interpretation of the findings of this study are consistent with the literature that claims that deficit thinking, like systemic racism, is so deeply entrenched in educational theory and practice that many schools who serve the needs of minoritized students perpetuate this mindset unwarily (Kincheloe, 2007; Scheurich & Skryla, 2003; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; and others). At Montclair High, pathologizing the lived experiences of the South Asian male students has become part of the school *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). This pathologizing worldview has become so deeply implanted in many of the structures, practices, and organization of the school that it has become the common-sense or default way of thinking in the school.

Question Two

What were the schooling experiences of the disaffected South Asian students? The key findings that address this question can be separated into seven parts: (a) South Asian male identity categories; (b) Brown boys—the disaffected group of South Asian male students featured in this study; (c) blame and surveillance; (d) appearance and groupings; (e) deficit thinking; (f) absence of lived experiences; and (g) complicity.

Identity Categories of the South Asian Male Students

At the beginning of this study, I was uncertain about who characterized the disaffected group of South Asian male students. During the yearlong study, it became

increasingly clear that the South Asian boys at Montclair High School were positioned in four categories: (1) Smart Brown guys; (2) New Immigrants; (3) Quiet Brown guys; and (4) the Brown crew or the Brown boys. Each of these categories, respectively, helped to determine how a particular group of South Asian students experienced formal schooling in different ways. Below, I summarize each of the four categories.

The Smart Brown guys who comprised the first group were the South Asian male students who were most likely to score high marks and receive academic recognition through honour roll status or subject excellence awards. They were, according to the participants interviewed in this study, destined for academic and “life” success. They were, however, considered the “anomaly.” They were considered the model South Asian male students, who were used as a way to further pathologize or condemn the low achievement commonly associated with the Brown boys in Montclair High School.

The second group of South Asian boys positioned at Montclair High was the recent immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent who were referred to by derogatory terms such as FOBs or “Fresh off the boats,” “Puns,” or “Dippers.” These newly arrived immigrants were further categorized in two different groups. The first group comprised the hardworking South Asian students—“preferred immigrants”—who took their studies very seriously. Whether or not they were academically successful, these students were seen as diligent and industrious, despite “all of their obvious challenges.” The second group of newly arrived immigrants was positioned as inferior, uncivilized, and dirty. They were the stereotypical immigrants who brought to Canada their boorish and undignified ways of life from their impoverished and under-developed countries. Unlike the “preferred immigrant” who knew “his place,” these demanding immigrants did not

have a clue about “their place.” Instead of being grateful for the privilege of living in Canada, these students, according to the majority of participants interviewed, were behaving as though living here was their right. Even though this group of students experienced racist acts and varying degrees of disenfranchisement in the school, their disaffection—also worthy of a separate study—did not resemble the characteristics of disaffection and concern that were discussed in local and national newspapers, think-tanks, schools, and Gurdwaras.

The third group of South Asian boys categorized at Montclair High School was the “quiet Brown guys,” a default or catch-all category for the South Asian boys who did not fall into the other three categories. These students were invisible; strangely Brown, but invisible. Even though they were inconspicuous in the school—no one seemed to pay much attention to them or their behaviours—their skin color was of significance.

The fourth group of South Asian boys comprised the Brown boys or Brown crew, who were the focus of this study. They were the disaffected students who were purported to experience disproportionate academic failure and disciplinary measures.

Proposed Explanation of the Term Brown Boy

The majority of the educators, educational leaders, and non-South Asian students at Montclair High School used the term “Indo-Canadian” to refer to students who were positioned or positioned themselves as South Asian. The majority of the disaffected South Asian male students detested the hyphenated identity of “Indo-Canadian” and instead positioned themselves as Brown boys or Brown crew. Even though the epithet of Brown boy originated as a derogatory term—it was used condescendingly by teachers who referred to the violent gangster male students who attended Montclair several years

previous—the Brown boys re-appropriated it and re-signified the term with a subject-position of their own liking. By populating the term “Brown boy” with meanings that elicited emotions of fear, unease, and even foreboding, the Brown boys remapped the coordinates of power so that now, instead of the teachers, they controlled the psychological and emotional evocations of the epithet. Their varied school experiences, as I examined extensively from Chapters 6 to 11, were negatively influenced by how others positioned them and how they positioned themselves as Brown boys.

To clarify, when describing what it meant to be a Brown boy, skin color, among three other features, which I explored extensively in Chapter 6, stood out. For these Brown boys, however, Brown was more than skin color; it became an emblem to show all others, in and out of school, that times had changed. Brown meant an opportunity to seize the power away from those who in the past had oppressed and subjugated Brown people. Brown skin became a palimpsest for this new generation of Brown boys at Montclair High School to re-write on their skin a new discourse of power.

Educational literature is silent about how minoritized students, particularly those of South Asian origin re-position their identities and how they lay claim to discursive and physical power in schools. For this reason, this finding is particularly important. It reminds educators and school leaders of (a) the agency that students do have to (re-) position their own identities and, more importantly, (b) the epistemic significance of identities; that is, who the minoritized students understand themselves to be will have direct and indirect consequences on how they experience and understand their school and worldly experiences.

Blame and Surveillance

Aside from the deficit manner in which they were positioned, as narrated in Chapter 9, the Brown boys were most tortured and hurt about being blamed for everything that went wrong in the school. Every single Brown boy that I interviewed complained that he was unfairly profiled and a target of surveillance. That is, the Brown boys claimed their behaviours—which they believed were “read” exclusively from a lexicon of transgression—were unjustly monitored by lunch supervisors, teachers, and administration. They believed that their actions and behaviours in public were excessively scrutinized, which contributed to their perceptions of an oppressive and unjust schooling environment. Although many of these Brown boys knew that, at times, they did engage in insubordinate behaviour, the negativity, surveillance, and discipline they experienced on a regular basis were generally not commensurate to their actions. Most of them felt that the scrutinizing eye of the school was excessive and linked most definitely to something more than just their observable behaviours in the school halls and classrooms.

The interpretations of these findings are consistent with the pathologizing literature (Shields, et al., 2005) and the studies linking race, crime, and media (Ericson 1991; Goodey, 2001; Henry et. al. 1996; and Jiwani, 2006) that I cited above when summarizing the criminalization of the Brown boys’ behaviour.

Appearance and Groupings

According to the non-South Asian teachers and administration, the Brown boys’ propensity for assembling in large groups—and dressed in a way that appropriated gang couture—was viewed not only as inherently deviant, but indicated a predilection toward

violent and criminal behaviours. The two groups of Brown boys—the wannabes and the hardcore—however, saw their group numbers, clothing, and social behaviour differently. Although the wannabe Brown boys recognized that convoking in large numbers possibly invoked fear in others, they were still bewildered as to why it was their burden to bear. Awareness that others did not want them to congregate in large groups was one thing, but agreeing with the sentiment or rule was quite another. For these Brown boys, assembling in groups was a social need. They were simply friends hanging out; sometimes it would lead to fun, pranks, and antics, sometimes it would lead to “sending a message” to others, but most of the time, it was fulfilling a need for companionship. The hardcore group of Brown boys, who formed a small minority of the entire group of Brown boys, saw the situation differently. Apart from companionship, invoking fear and intimidation in others was another desirable goal. In fact, to ensure that social power resided with them, the hardcore group of Brown boys enacted “rituals” of intimidation and aggression that successfully terrorized a large part of the school population. Nevertheless, both groups of Brown boys claimed that the educators and educational leaders at the school exacted consequences and surveillance practices that were in no way commensurate with their behaviours.

The interpretation of these findings can be linked to the essentialist critique of multiculturalism (Dolby, 2000; Hall, 1990; Moya, 2000; Woodward, 1997), which I elaborated on extensively in Chapter 2. That is, the tendency of one or two aspects of identity—in this case “Brown” and “male”—to be seen are the sole causes that constitute the social meaning or homogenized image of an individual or group’s experience. Additionally, the interpretations of these findings—particularly the socializing of the

Brown boys in large groups that are seen by educators and school leaders as deviant and aberrant—can be linked to the pathologizing literature (Shields, et al., 2005) that I have already referenced. In light of these essentializing and pathologizing practices, one can best understand the Brown boys' outrage of disproportional surveillance policies and unjust disciplinary measures exacted against them.

The Pathologization of Disaffected South Asian Male Students by Deficit Theorizing

Although both ways of pathologizing—criminalizing and deficit theorizing—were incendiary, humiliating, and injurious according to the testimonials and reflections of the Brown boys, the deficit manner in which the Brown boys were positioned was perhaps the most hurtful and damaging to the collective psyche of this group of South Asian male students. The open and straightforward declaration by the educators and non-South Asian students of the Brown boys' lack of intellectual ambition and abilities were, for the latter, disabling and defeating. This deficit view of the Brown boys' intellectual abilities had adversely affected how they saw themselves as Montclair High School students. Many of them confided in me that being positioned as academically inferior was a humiliation they could not bear. Although in public, these boys presented a leathery and vainglorious image, many of them carried inside them feelings of pain from degrading and humiliating comments made by past and present teachers and peers.

The interpretation of these findings is also consistent with the pathologizing literature (Kincheloe, 2007; Scheurich & Skryla, 2003; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; and others) that I cited above. The literature on the myriad possible effects of deficit theorizing from the perspectives of the minoritized students, however, is silent. For this reason, this finding is particularly salient as it reminds educators and school

leaders that how minoritized students are positioned will undoubtedly shape how they interpret their schooling experiences.

Complicity of the Brown Boys

Neils Bohr (Bohr quotes, 2009) aptly stated that “the opposite of a fact is falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth.” Although this study has found that the educators and educational leaders do pathologize the lived experiences and behaviours of the Brown boys through criminalization and deficit theorizing, it has also found that the Brown boys are complicit in the construction of their own pathologized identities and as a result have contributed also to their own disaffection. Paradoxically, these ostensibly opposite “truths” reveal a small glimpse into the aporia experienced at Montclair High. It is in this aporia, which I will discuss shortly, that the educators, educational leaders, students, and community members must begin to seek clarity, assume responsibility, and conceive new ways of behaving and acting.

This study found that the Brown boys were complicit in two key ways. The first was that in their effort to control the social and symbolic power of the school, they enacted rituals of intimidation and aggression that often violated school rules. The Brown boys realized, in varying degrees, that they would rather suffer disciplinary measures for their recalcitrance, but control the reins of power to the school. As I examined in Chapter 8, they seemed to want “to take charge” for three reasons. First, if their teachers and society, in general, were convinced that they were “violent thugs,” it was easier to live up to that image than to change it. They experienced, in and out of school, far more social “power”—albeit negative associations and versions of it—when interpellated into this

identity construct than by futilely resisting it. Second, in an effort to regain the self-respect and healthy community self-image that the Brown boys believed were robbed from them by the racist and neo-colonial actions of the dominant society, they often treated others, ironically, in ways that were disrespectful, condescending, and even violent. Third, by possessing the social power of the school, they would not “let history repeat itself.” That is, they pledged with stony resolve that the racism their parents, family members, and friends had experienced in the past would never occur again. Whatever power their parents’ oppressors had—which many of the Brown boys unsophisticatedly categorized as brute strength or might—they would seize and wield against anyone who even intimated, by word or body, that they were inferior or subservient. In their minds, they governed, in and out of school, the agenda of fear and intimidation. Lamentably, in an effort to break this cycle of “history repeating itself,” the Brown boys, in their decision to dragoon and intimidate others, have seemingly exacerbated the tension and apprehension that already characterize the relationship between the dominant society and various South Asian communities. Further research in this area, as I will expand on at the end of this chapter, is definitely recommended.

The second way that the Brown boys were complicit was that many of them chose to do poorly in school and chose to go against learning and achievement because they wanted to show their teachers and others that they were in control of their own academic achievement. To wrest power away from the educators, who, they knew, determined their marks, many of the Brown boys purposely performed poorly. To demonstrate to their teachers that they cared less about their power to judge and evaluate, many of them failed intentionally. They wanted to prove that it was they, the Brown

boys, and not the teachers, who possessed the power to determine their own academic performance. Ironically, they aimed to “control” their own marks. And, oddly, they felt a sense of power when they realized that their baffled teachers felt impotent to do anything about it. Further, to enforce and monitor this subversiveness, many of the Brown boys even taunted or derided any of their own crew members who seemed too eager to succeed in an assignment or exam, who accepted extra help from teachers, or who appeared to brown-nose or boot-lick.

These findings resonate, in part, with elements of resistance theory that have been advanced by many scholars (see: Dei, Mazzuca, & Zine, 1997; Day, 2008; Dolby, Dimitriadis & Willis, 2004; Giroux, 2001; Willis, 1977). Stated briefly, this theory suggests that poor academic achievement is not a result of lower ability levels or cultural deficits, but more a result of students unwilling to comply with the values, norms, and expectations of school authorities and rejecting competitive academic and social rituals and practices designed and necessary for success in schools. Even though resistance theory did not form part of the conceptual tools for this study—and hence I did not review the literature—I reference it, after the fact, to suggest that there exist striking potential and intriguing possibilities to link further research into the disaffection of the Brown boys with resistance theory. Nevertheless, the literatures of critical multiculturalism, transformative educational leadership, deficit thinking, and identity theory that I reviewed and advanced in this study are silent with respect to minoritized students complicit in the pathologization of their own identities. For this reason, this finding should impel educators and school leaders to critically examine systemic school

structures and institutional policies and practices that may be causing or exacerbating the transgressions of these minoritized students.

Grand Tour Question

How did the schooling experiences of disaffected South Asian male students exacerbate or alleviate their problem of disaffection? This study has shown that when the educators and educational leaders pathologized the lived experiences of the Brown boys; engaged in deficit theorizing discourses and practices; failed to mobilize the identities of the Brown boys in the classrooms; insulated themselves from the potential of the lived experiences that the South Asian communities had to offer; and excluded the Brown boys and community members from authorizing their perspectives (Cook-Sather, 2002) to inform disciplinary and other school practice-shaping decisions, the disaffection of the Brown boys was exacerbated. This study has also shown that the Brown boys were complicit in the pathologizing of their own identities, which among other detrimental effects, exacerbated their disaffection at school. Although this study has uncovered far more schooling practices that exacerbate South Asian male disaffection, there were a few educators and educational leaders whose practices, dispositions, and deliberate interventions helped mitigate the disaffection of some Brown boys. Grounding these findings in the larger narratives of critical multiculturalism, transformative educational leadership, postmodern and postpositive realist theories of identity, dialogue, and pathologizing practices, I summarize below how educators, educational leaders, and the Brown boys themselves, can begin to mitigate the problem of disaffection in schools and create educational experiences that are democratic, academically excellent, and socially just (Shields, 2003, 2007). After each section, I identify succinctly, recommendations for

individual stakeholders, where applicable, that grow out of the findings and context of this study. I am fully aware that each recommendation is worthy of an extended discussion; however, given my aim, in this concluding chapter, is to distill or draw out from this narrative study some key learnings and recommendations, I keep the explanations of each recommendation concise.

Reject Pathologizing Practices and Deficit Theorizing

As I explored in Chapter 10, the South Asian teachers who rejected pathologizing practices and deficit theorizing and instead focused on developing relationships with the Brown boys that demonstrated they were all valued; they could all succeed; and they would not engage in a culture of excuse manufacturing, claimed that not only the Brown boys, but all of the minoritized students whom they taught benefitted. Likewise, Wagstaff and Fusarelli (1995), Shields et al., (2005) and others (Gay, 2000; Kincheloe, 2007; Nieto, 2000) claim that the most important determinant in the academic success of minoritized students is the explicit rejection of deficit thinking by educators. Clearly, other curricular, pedagogical, philosophical, and systemic innovations are necessary and required, but without this first step of repositioning one's fundamental belief that all minoritized students are capable of success, many of these reform measures could prove fruitless. Having said this, however, explicitly rejecting deficit thinking without attending to systemic obstacles can, in the long term, also prove fruitless.

It stands to reason that all educators and educational leaders at Montclair High School must reject pathologizing practices and deficit theorizing as an important first step to help alleviate the disaffection beleaguering the Brown boys. I must underline, it is not my intent to attack or blame the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High

School. I am aware of and understand acutely that pathologizing discourses and practices are widespread and have, over time, deepened into our educational system (Shields, et al., 2005). They are very much part of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) of our schools. My aim, on the contrary, is to hold all educators accountable. If educators are to create safe learning spaces that help mitigate the disaffection of the South Asian male populations, they must reject pathologizing and deficit theorizing. Indeed, to reject pathologizing and deficit theorizing also requires fighting against the hegemonic apparatuses of the dominant groups that ascribe deficiency to difference and re-code diversity as deviance. This is extremely difficult and requires courage. Nevertheless, it is exactly what we, educators, must do. Only when we identify our pathologizing dispositions and “reposition [ourselves] within discourses that offer solutions rather than blame,” (Shields, et al., 2005; p. 146), can we ensure for our students an educational environment that will enable them to “flourish” (Brighthouse, 2008).

Recommendations: For Educators and Educational Leaders

1. Explicitly reject deficit theorizing of the Brown boys’ academic abilities.

Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) why do I immediately attribute “failure” to dispositions and abilities within my students and deflect the need to or resist interrogating the institutional practices or my own practices that may be adversely affecting or contributing to my students’ outcomes? (b) Is my definition of “success” and “failure” too narrow? How and to what purposes are my judgments used or applied to these minoritized students? (c) What are my motivations when I engage in blaming, generalizing, and pathologizing my minoritized students’ abilities?

2. Identify motivations for and then stop criminalizing the behaviours and actions of the Brown boys. Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) why am I resistant to seeking explanations for my minoritized students' perceived need for non-conformity to the dominant values, norms, and values of the school? (b) Is it expedient or uncomplicated to criminalize the behaviour of my minoritized students than to analyze the social and political expectations and organizational structures of my school? (c) Am I open to socially "different" behaviours in the classrooms and schools or do I conceptualize "difference" as a threat or deviancy?
3. Identify and reject interpretations of school policies and school practices that systemically pathologize the lived experiences and cultures of the South Asian communities. Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) what prevents me from seeing and believing that, like individuals from the dominant society, my minoritized students' and families' also aspire to live a "good and worthwhile life" (Coulter, et al., 2008)? Their routes and ways may be different, but should their efforts be dismissed, inferiorized, or pathologized? (b) Why do I privilege discourses and practices that pathologize my minoritized students, their home environments, or cultures instead of investing time and resources to critically analyze institutional policies and practices that may be adversely affecting the educational, social, and material outcomes of these students?

Recognizing One's Own Biases

Indeed, the South Asian teachers were the strongest advocates for the Brown boys; they claimed they understood the intricacies of the Brown boys' disaffection because of their own experiences of minoritization, subjugation, and pathologization.

There were, however, White educators and educational leaders—albeit a very small minority of the total participants interviewed—who had a sophisticated understanding of the many factors that contributed to the Brown Boys’ disaffection. Not surprisingly, these educators and educational leaders worked hard at recognizing their own ethnocentrism and biases. In the words of a self-identified White educational leader interviewed:

I don’t think I can ever fully understand [all] the factors that shapes [sic] the lives of these boys. It may seem from the outside to me that they don’t care about school, their marks, their homework. But I have to ask myself, why do I see it that way? Is it because I interpret their behaviours as “don’t care” based on my reference point? Are they my values that I am putting on them? Am I quick to evaluate them or am I attempting to understand them from *their* perspectives?

This is an important point for *all* educators and educational leaders. By making explicit our unexamined cultural biases, we are less likely to misunderstand the behaviours and action of our minoritized students and thus treat them inequitably (Weinstein et al., 2004). Given that the majority of the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High School specifically, and in North America generally, are predominately White, it is incumbent on them to challenge their own personal and professional assumptions and prejudices. In the tradition of critical multiculturalism and transformative educational leadership, Whiteness must not be seen as the neutral, invisible, and universal reference point. It can no longer be the imperializing “White eye” (Hall, 2000) of the school that classifies and categorizes how the minoritized are viewed and treated and how much of the intellectual, social, and material resources they should be able to access. I argue, therefore, that to help mitigate the problem of disaffection experienced by the Brown boys, White educators and educational leaders must examine their own assumptions and practices, identify their biases and prejudices in relation to the “Other”, and reposition

themselves using discourses and practices that search for understanding and solutions instead of blame and pathology.

Having said this, I must not however ignore one of the most common refrains I heard from *both* the non-South Asian and South Asian educators. A well-meaning White female social studies teacher captures this refrain fully: “What kind of change can we really make individually, especially when we are all trapped in school bureaucracies and societal institutions that do not want to change.” Indeed, institutional change is hard, especially because it is the institutions in power that prevent us from making these changes. To reframe this conundrum and see it in a different light, I invoke the wisdom of Willis (1977):

There is no reason why we cannot ask those whose *work* is social and caring to operate under the tension and irony of the relationship between two levels in their activity ... to face immediate problems in doing ‘the best’ (so far as they can see it) for their clients whilst appreciating all the time that these very actions may help to reproduce the structures within which the problem arises. Within the doom the latter seems to place on the former there are spaces and potentials for changing the balances of uncertainty which reproduce the living society. [Italics in original] (p. 186)

Undoubtedly, individual teachers are handcuffed to educational and societal systems that perpetuate inequities. However, as Willis suggests, there is no contradiction in requesting educators and educational leaders “to work on two levels simultaneously” (p. 186). While influencing, at the macro-level, as many gatekeepers as possible both inside and outside of education (Delpit, 1995) to catalyze change at the systemic level, educators and educational leaders can and must continue to work on themselves, as I have already stated, by recognizing their own ethnocentrism, biases, prejudices, and assumptions that consciously and sub-consciously perpetuate an inferior educational experience for

minoritized students. Change does not necessarily have to occur from the top down as many of the Montclair educators and educational leaders declared. Fullan (1993) claims that change flourishes in a sandwich; “when there is consensus above, and pressure below, things happen” (p. 37). For educators and educational leaders who believe they are strangled by the invisible hand of structural constraint must counter this skepticism with hope—an “ontological need” (Freire, 2004; p. 2)—in order to have any chance at all to improve the educational experiences of minoritized students.

Recommendations: For Educators and Educational Leaders

1. Examine one’s own biases, prejudices, assumptions, and ethnocentrism. For political and social change to occur, educators and school leaders must start catalyzing change within themselves (Dei, 1996; hooks, 1995). Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) how am I implicated in the societal and institutional discourses and practices that privilege the lives of some and deny or denigrate the humanity of others? (b) When teaching and leading, what prevents me from understanding and learning from the epistemologies, values, and perspectives of my minoritized students? (c) How can I rupture and then shift my belief systems and perspectives to engage the different and multiple ways of knowing the world that my minoritized students bring to their classrooms and schools?
2. Even though institutional change is slow and seemingly insurmountable, educators and educational leaders must remain hopeful and continue changing practices that they have control over. Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) how is my individual agency bound to and restrained by

institutional power? And, subsequently, what choices must I make to interrupt or disrupt this power? (b) How will I keep front and center in my mind and heart that power is *also* relational and not fixed and hence, power can be negotiated, contested, and subverted through discursive means (Delpit, 1995; Derrida, 2000).

Affirming Students' Identities

As I examined extensively in Chapter 10, when the English and social studies teachers at Montclair attempted to create innovative curricular spaces into their teaching where the South Asian students had a choice whether or not to integrate their lived experiences into the content, interest in the curriculum and generally for the course seemed to increase. Clearly, other studies would have to determine whether or not this approach of building into the curriculum the lived experiences of the students directly helped to alleviate the Brown boys' problems of disaffection; however, as the findings in this study illustrated, the opposite seemed to be true. When teachers did not seem inclined to or interested in honoring, as Palmer (1998) states: "the 'little' stories of the individuals [with] the 'big' stories of the disciplines and traditions" (p. 76), the Brown boys did not see, at all, the relevance of the course and were not intrinsically motivated to engage or at times, even continue with the course. Based on the findings of this study and the extensive literature that supports this claim (Brown University, 2003; Cummins, 2002, 2001; Gay, 2000; Kincheloe, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001⁴⁵), I submit that the educators and educational leaders at Montclair specifically, and all schools generally, must create opportunities in their classes and schools for their students to speak from the epistemic stance (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006) that their multiple identities

⁴⁵ See a more complete list of references in Chapter 2

provide. Over and above, I contend that all educators and educational leaders not only at Montclair, but all schools must (1) learn about; (2) build caring environments, and (3) mobilize the identities of their minoritized students. Except in a few cases, these educationally sound practices—that I propose are necessary for a social just, academically excellent, and democratic education—were absent from the schooling practices at Montclair High School.

Learning About Students

In this study, not only the Brown boys but most of the South Asian and non-South Asian students interviewed claimed that their teachers did not know anything about them. Because their teachers did not display an interest in their lives, they found it hard to personally invest in the courses. Given the epistemic significance of identity (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006), educators and educational leaders must make significant efforts to learn more about their individual students; the more they know, the more apt they will be to incorporate into their teaching the students “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000), or whatever one wants to label the background context students bring into the classroom. Educators and educational leaders who have knowledge of their students’ lives—hobbies, community involvement, afterschool jobs, religious involvement, and sports among others—can strategically and purposively weave this knowledge into their teaching and leading, thereby increasing their students’ motivation to learn (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). Additionally, by showing an interest in pop culture (eg: popular video games, TV shows, music, clothing styles, and runners)—a relentless and ubiquitous identity shaping influence—educators and educational leaders not only signal to students an interest in their day-to-day realities,

but they weave in what is current with “official” curriculum to heighten academic and social engagement.

Learning about students also means speaking to parents and guardians, conducting home visits, and learning about communities in which they live. As I have already emphasized, despite over one third of the school population self-identifying as South Asian, the majority of the staff and leadership at the school not only insulated themselves from the South Asian communities, but many of them inferiorized and even pathologized the cultural capital that these communities had to offer. This must change if educators and educational leaders at Montclair want to help alleviate the problem of disaffection experienced by the Brown boys. They must begin by taking an active interest and participating in the “Punjabi Evenings” so popular amongst the South Asian students and community members. Plying together the resulting insights, references, and anecdotes from these “anthropological” and “sociological” field observations may not only enable the educators and educational leaders to enrich, enliven, and deepen the curriculum, but begin to create a culturally affirming and inclusive school community that all the South Asian students craved for so desperately.

Commitment to Building Caring Classroom Communities

Another finding in this study was the repeated and fervent complaint by the Brown boys that the school administration and their teachers did not care about them or their well-being. I submit that another key way that the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High can alleviate South Asian male disaffection is through the creation of socially just and caring learning

communities in the classroom (Sheets & Gay, 1996). The extensive educational literature on the ethic of care in teaching would strongly support my submission (Noddings, 1999, 1992; Ware, 2006; Gay, 2000, 2002; and Sheets and Gay, 1996). All students are motivated when they believe that teachers care about them educationally and personally (Nodding, 1999, 1992). The type of caring I am suggesting is not the cloyingly sweet dissemination of happy stickers and high fives after a correct answer, but a type of ethic that “implies a continuous search for competence” (Nodding, 1992; p. 676). Caring educators and educational leaders set high expectations and expect their students to work diligently to achieve their best (Gay, 2000). They are “warm demanders” (Kleinfeld, cited in Ware, 2006; p.433) with expectations that are high and their demand for respect is no more than what they would proffer to their students. They reflect in their teaching and leading a vision of hope and possibility for all their students. Perhaps most importantly—which I believe is most applicable for the disaffected Brown boys—they encourage and support their students to chase their possibilities by skillfully braiding encouragement and strategy with expectation and consequence.

Mobilizing the Identities of Minoritized Students

One of the most heartfelt recommendations made by the South Asian teachers at Montclair High School was to acknowledge and capitalize, wherever possible, the Brown boys many ways of knowing. What they meant, in the words of Moya (2006), was to mobilize the identities of the South Asian students—to “mine [their] identity-based perspectives to see what insights into an issue they might have to offer, as well as [to] subject [their] identities to evaluation and possible transformation” (p. 108). The South

Asian teachers claimed that although they did not always understand the Brown boys' choice of interpretations, rationales, or behaviours, they believed that these students were rational beings (Delpit 1995) and their behaviours were governed by an inner logic. Who they were—how the diverse life forces shaped their identities, how others positioned them, and how they positioned themselves—influenced how they learned and how they interpreted their schooling experiences. Hence, based on the findings of this study, the recommendations of the South Asian students who have experienced varying degrees of success teaching the Brown boys, the extant literature of critical multiculturalism, and the growing educational literature in this area of mobilizing postpositive realist constructions of identities in the classroom (Mohanty 2000; Moya, 2000, 2006), I submit that not only the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High, but educators and educational leaders at all schools, must begin to recognize in their minoritized students, the strength and validity of a plurality of ways of thinking, behaving, relating, and learning (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). That is, they must begin to mobilize the identities of their minoritized students because they understand that these students who come from different social locations have different meaning systems and although they may apprehend the world differently, their many ways of knowing are as valid as that of the dominant culture's privileged way of knowing. All educators and educational leaders must be acutely aware that even though our society privileges the White, middle-class frame of reference, it is not inherently superior to other frames. In summary, I contend that mobilizing the identities of the Brown boys combined with a caring relationship built on the genuine desire “to learn and understand from where these Brown boys are coming

from,” as one of the South Asian teachers stated, will begin to help the Brown boys identify and possibly even alleviate some of the sources of their disaffection.

Recommendations: For Educators and Educational Leaders

1. Educators and educational leaders must create opportunities in their classrooms and schools for minoritized students to speak from the epistemologies that their multiple identities provide. To do this, educators and school leaders must ask themselves (as I have explained above):
 - a. How do I learn about my students?
 - b. How do I build caring classrooms and school communities?
 - c. How do I mobilize the identities of my minoritized students?

Dialogue

Dialogue has been one of the conceptual frameworks that has undergirded this entire narrative study. It has also been the cornerstone in the methodological approach articulated in this study. Dialogue is not simply “talk” but what Shields and Edwards (2005) call “relationships and understanding that lead to ethical action—action that is essential, communal, and collaborative” (p. 161). At Montclair High, dialogue between the educators and Brown boys for the most part was instrumental and not ontological. With the exception of one educational leader, discipline was exacted hierarchically and not dialogically and most importantly, did not include the voices and perspectives of the Brown boys in the restorative process. Given the long history of violence associated with the South Asian male students at Montclair, the regular and sustained behaviour challenges faced by the school staff annually, and the disaffection that the Brown boys

complained about vociferously year after year, the lack of dialogue—or even the reluctance or disinclination to initiate dialogue—amongst the educational leaders, educators, Brown boys, and the South Asian community members to examine these issues was surprising and perplexing. I submit that to begin alleviating the disaffection experienced by the Brown boys, but more importantly, to address the concerns faced by all of the stakeholders, dialogue must become an ethic of the school. To begin cultivating this ethic, especially in the aporia experienced at Montclair High, the educational leaders at the school must assume the responsibility of dialogue and initiate the process. In turn, for dialogue to have a chance, each of the stakeholders must be willing to suspend judgment, remain mindful of one’s own biases and situatedness, risk fault, and truly and deeply seek to understand each other.

I make this suggestion fully realizing that it could be read as naïve and idealistic. I fully accept this charge, but justify my submission with two observations based directly from the findings. First: a South Asian teacher whose house was vandalized by a gang of Brown boys—as I recounted in Chapter 11—organized a very successful evening school meeting with over 40 South Asian parents to explore this and other violent episodes that had occurred during the school year. Both she and the leadership team claimed that not only did this first-of-its-kind meeting help address the vandalism problem, but it had the potential to address, as one of the educational leaders stated, some of the “intractable issues” facing the school and the Brown boys. In the four years after the promise of this first meeting, no such meetings were ever organized. Second: with the presence

of a South Asian cultural worker on staff for well over two years, whose mandate includes improving school-community participation, the potential for dialogical success is present. However, despite the potential of this dialogical infrastructure, no such dialogue has been initiated by the school. To conclude, aside from my unadulterated belief in the promise and potentiality of dialogue, it is the precedence of successful dialogue that has occurred in the past and the possibility of present and future success because of the necessary human resources already in place at Montclair that I underline the importance of this suggestion.

Recommendations: For All Stakeholders:

1. Dialogue involves listening to those with different perspectives, not just talking at them. “Listening,” as Delpit (1995) aptly states, “requires not only open eyes and ears, but also hearts and minds” (p. 46). For all of these stakeholders to engage in polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984), they must ask themselves: (a) what will it mean for me to invite the “Other” to, not only enter into my worldview, but influence and perhaps even shape my perspectives and interpretations? (b) How will I re-double my commitment and courage to continue engaging in polyphonic dialogue when miscommunication, misunderstanding, and miscommunication inevitably occur? (c) What will it mean to hold two or more dissenting or incongruous views on a subject and how will I proceed from dialogue to action?
2. A series of meetings or fora should be held regularly to bring together groups of students, parents, educators, and community members to (a) identify concerns; (b) listen to and understand the concerns of each group; (c) listen to

and understand the perspectives and beliefs of each group; and (d) develop a shared vision of how to improve the educational experiences of South Asian students.

Brown Boys Taking Responsibility

As I have already mentioned above—and explored in Chapter 6 and 8—the Brown boys wanted to prove to all their peers and school staff that the locus of social power in the school resided with them. Although further research is required to understand and examine the reasons for their behaviours, I state emphatically that *whatever* their reasons and no matter how difficult the task, the Brown boys cannot continue seizing social and symbolic power in ways that are aggressive, intimidating, or violent. I understand fully, as a minoritized student, teacher, researcher, and individual in this society, who in each one of these identity frames, has experienced harrowing episodes of discrimination and disenfranchisement, that at times, seizing social power and using it against others in an unethical manner feels warranted and justified; however, for the overall good of the self, school, community, and society at large, these types of immoral behaviours cannot continue and must never be tolerated. I must underline, that I am in no way discouraging the Brown boys to participate in the culture of power; in fact, I strongly believe that not only the Brown boys, but all minoritized students must be taught the necessary codes needed to participate fully in the culture of power (Delpit, 1995). However, with power comes responsibility; it is the ethical use of this power that I believe the Brown boys need to learn how to carefully negotiate.

Having said this, I am very aware that the Brown boys may not be able to engage in such self-evaluation and self-critique of their own behaviours on their own. They will

need guidance. I submit, therefore, that the educators and educational leaders initiate dialogue with the Brown boys and community members to explore the best possible ways to begin this process. I am fully aware that I am unintentionally vague and that I am not providing specific methodologies or strategies to address this issue. This, however, was not the intent of this study. Instead, the twin purposes of this study were to understand the schooling experiences of the disaffected South Asian males and to understand how educators and educational leaders understand and relate their South Asian students. I believe this narrative study has accomplished these goals by “mapping new terrain” for further research to seek innovative methodologies to not only alleviate the disaffection of some groups of South Asian male students, but more importantly, to create for *all* students educational experiences that are democratic, academically excellent, and socially just (Shields, 2003, 2007).

Recommendations: For Brown Boys

1. With the help of educators, educational leaders, parents, and community members, the Brown boys in their search to participate in the culture of power must begin to use this power in an ethical and socially conscience manner. The Brown boys must ask themselves: (a) why do I choose to claim and exercise social and symbolic power in ways that continue to pathologize my own identity? How can I claim and exercise social and symbolic power in ethical and socially conscience ways? (b) How I can stop engaging in recalcitrant attitudes, behaviours, and actions that induce educators and school leaders to employ—albeit disproportionately—surveillance and disciplinary measures, which inevitably lead me to experience further disaffection and disenfranchisement?

Transformative Educational Leadership

At Montclair High, although school and teacher leaders claimed that their teaching and leading philosophies were rooted in many of the tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2008, 2009), their words and my interpretation of the findings conveyed a different story. Save one school leader, the other teacher and school leaders engaged in discourses and practices that, to varying degrees, criminalized, inferiorized, and pathologized the schooling and lived experiences of the Brown boys. This cannot happen and must stop. To mitigate the schooling factors that exacerbate the disaffection South Asian male student, teacher and school leaders must consider implementing the recommendations I have identified above and also commit to translating into action the key principles of transformative leadership. Building on the transformative practices that one of the school's vice-principals has been attempting to integrate into the leadership of the school—but with little success during the past year—I identify four critical areas as starting points to consider. First, as I highlighted above, given the long history of violence and disaffection linked with the South Asian males and the aporia experienced in the school, the school leaders must create dialogical opportunities with the teachers, South Asian students, parents, and community members to explore innovative ways to address these concerns.

Second, the school and teacher leaders must begin to identify and reshape the knowledge and belief structures of their colleagues and staff who, according to the Brown boys and South Asian teachers, pathologize the lived experiences of the South Asian students (Astin & Astin, 2000; Capper, 1989; Shields 2003a, 2009). The annual “Punjabi” evenings that were organized by many South Asian students must be attended

and supported by the entire staff and leadership. To ignore, dismiss, or diminish the importance of these types of community building events, not only projects to the entire school community a strong message that the South Asian students and community are not valued, but further exacerbates the disenfranchisement, disaffection, and abandonment already felt by the South Asian students and teachers.

Third, the provincially examinable second language course, Punjabi, at Montclair High must be positioned differently. The educational leaders at the school must refrain from continuously scheduling the course in a portable outside the main school building, which as the findings of this study suggest further marginalize, both physically and psychologically, the South Asian students. Additionally, the school leaders must work with the language department to ensure that Punjabi receives equitable school and community publicity, recruitment cache, and funds as do French and Spanish, the other two languages courses (MacKinnon, 2000; Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley, 1991; Shields, 2003a, 2003b).

Fourth, the teacher and school leaders must develop new and effective school disciplinary strategies after listening to and considering the concerns and perspectives of the South Asian students, parents, and community members. Building into the disciplinary schedule of the school bulwarks that are culturally sensitive and equitable would most probably hasten the acceptance and compliance of the students. Granted that disciplinary schedules must be applied fairly to *all* students of the school; however, fair does not mean the same. To achieve equity, oftentimes we must consider building in nuances in our practices that honour difference. This requires moral courage (Greenfield,

1999; Quick & Normore, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992) which I submit must form the backbone of all who choose to lead.

Recommendations: For Teacher and School Leaders

1. Identify and reshape the knowledge and belief structures of colleagues and staff. Educators and school leaders must ask themselves: (a) how can we make building relationships with the South Asian communities a priority? Why, for example, are the “Punjabi” evenings organized and performed by the South Asian students poorly attended by the non-South Asian educators, leaders, and staff? (b) How can we reposition Punjabi as a bona fide language course in the school? (c) How can we work with the South Asian students, parents, and community members to develop new and effective disciplinary practices that are equitable to all students?

Questions for Further Research

As I mentioned above, this narrative study has mapped new terrain; it has begun to contribute to the dearth of critical educational research on the schooling experiences of South Asian male students and how educators and educational leaders relate to these South Asian male students. What has been elucidated by this study simultaneously reveals areas that require further research. Below, I identify four questions.

Throughout the course of this narrative study, particularly when the Brown boys discussed the issue of power, they referred to “not letting history repeat itself,” regaining self-respect, and aspiring to a healthy collective community self-image. Why were the more violent or aggressive methods the preferred choice for the Brown boys to regain their self and community self respect? Were there factors or obstacle preventing them to choose more ethical ways? What kind of educational, communal, and societal supports

must be put in place for the Brown boys to engage in more socially and ethically appropriate ways to build self and community respect?

To demonstrate to their teachers that they cared less about their power to judge and evaluate, many Brown boys in this study scored poorly or even failed intentionally on assignments and tests. The Brown boys wanted to prove that it was they and not their teachers, who possessed the power to determine their own academic performance. Why did the Brown boys choose to exercise power in a way that not only continues to pathologize their identities but compromises their long term future? What personal, schooling, communal, and societal factors contribute to this type of decision-making?

This study recognized that to some degree socio-cultural factors—namely the privileged treatment of the male children and the unconditional safety net provided for all the male children to enter into the family business—did negatively influence the schooling experiences of the Brown boys at Montclair High School. Even though these factors are outside the schooling domain, further investigation into these socio-cultural influences could provide schools, families, and South Asian community members with possible insights and approaches to help mitigate the disaffection experienced by the South Asian male students.

When the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High were asked to share their teaching and leadership philosophies, the following terms and concepts traded freely in their conversations: “valuing diversity”, “encouraging multiple perspectives”, “promoting social responsibility” and “ensuring cross-cultural understanding”. Many of these terms and concepts reflected the promise of critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy and transformative leadership. The research data, however, conveyed an

altogether different story. Themes that emerged with consistent regularity illustrated the pervasive tendencies of the educators and educational leaders to pathologize the lived experiences of South Asian boys. Why does there exist such a disparity between the educators and educational leaders' ideals and their day-to-day practices?

Concluding Comments

If we believe that among other goals, the purpose of education “is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society” (Ministry of Education, 2008; p. 4) we must, as educators, take this responsibility seriously and ensure that *all* our students’ “develop their individual potential and acquire the [necessary] knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” This must also ring true for the Brown boys, who are experiencing disturbing levels of academic failure and disaffection. Specifically, with the Brown boys, we, as educators, must be able to work with them to mobilize their identities by capitalizing on their lived realities and multiple ways of knowing to ensure that all of them have realistic opportunities to succeed academically. Additionally, each of the stakeholders charged with the education of the Brown boys—including their parents, families, community members, and themselves—must participate in dialogue, as Bakhtin (1984) claims, fully and wholly, “with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds” (p. 293). In this way, we can begin to understand through our differences a commonality of understanding. Aside from many other possibilities, perhaps, through “deep” dialogue, all of the stakeholders together are able to conceive innovative and unconventional methodologies that when collectively endorsed and implemented can begin to mitigate the disaffection plaguing the Brown boys.

Even before, however, beginning to initiate dialogue with all the stakeholders or to mobilize the identities of the Brown boys, the first and most important step the educators and educational leaders at Montclair High School must engage in is a change in mindset. They must stop engaging in pathologizing practices and deficit theorizing: Arguably, the most important finding of this narrative study. All the educators and educational leaders must refrain from pathologizing the lived experiences, abilities, and behaviours of the Brown boys. Instead, they must widen their circumference of vision to determine all possible causes of the Brown boys' low academic performance, disaffection, and disenfranchisement. This would inevitably include scrutinizing many of the schools' policies and practices, but most importantly, their own attitudes, values, ethnocentrism, and practices.

To conclude, I submit that much more than technocratic reforms are needed in order to alleviate the disaffection of some groups of South Asian male students and ensure their full inclusion as contributing and productive members of a democratic society. It will require policies and practices that transcend prescriptive programmes and accountability measures to address the wider contemporary, historic, and systemic societal influences that privilege some and disadvantage others. It will require empathetic listening to the afflicted voices of the minoritized. It will require mobilizing their identities and thus, their epistemologies. It will require difficult dialogue. It will certainly require guidance, but guidance focused on attitudes, beliefs, and the moral purposes of the educational enterprise. It will require the work— our work— of educators and educational leaders grounded in the tenets of critical multiculturalism and transformative leadership.

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APPENDIX 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational Studies

Mailing address:

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374

Fax: 604-822-4244

<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

**Minoritized Student Identities, School Spaces, and Learning:
A Narrative Inquiry**

Interview Protocol

Sample Student Interview Questions:

1. What do you think and feel about school?
2. Tell me stories or incidents of some positive experiences at school.
3. Tell me stories or incidents of some negative experiences at school.
4. What are your favorite subjects? Worst subjects?
5. What makes [course] your favorite? Share with me some images, incidents, memories that come to mind.
6. What makes [course] your worst? Share with me some images, incidents, memories that come to mind.
7. Tell me stories or incidents of some positive experiences in your social studies class.
8. Tell me stories or incidents of some negative experiences in your social studies class.
9. What comes to mind when I say "student identity"?
10. What is the relationship between your experiences and identity?
11. How would you describe your identity?
12. What are some of the most important aspects of your identity?
13. Can you bring your "identity" to school? Why or why not?
 - a. What part of your identity is easy to express/bring to school?
 - b. What part of your identity is hard to express/bring to school?
14. Does your school/teacher(s)/class(es) encourage you to express/bring your identity(ies) to your school/school work? Think of some specific experiences, incidents, anecdotes that would help me understand.
15. Does your identity influence what you learn? Explain.
16. Does your identity influence how you learn? Explain

17. Are there specific characteristics of people's identity that make them more or less successful in school? Share with me incidents or memories that come to mind. .

Sample Educational Leader/Teacher Interview Questions:

1. What is your leadership/educational philosophy?
2. What do you understand by the term "identity"?
3. What is the relationship between "lived experiences" and identity?
4. What aspects of "identities" do students bring to school? Are there some incidents, stories, anecdotes that you can use to illustrate?
5. Are there any relationships between these aspects of identities and school "success" and/or school "failure"? Explain.
 - a. What is your understanding of school "success"?
 - b. What is your understanding of school "failure"?
6. Do schools/courses/curricula encourage students to bring their "identities" to schools? Why or why not?
 - a. If so, what aspects are reinforced?
 - b. What aspects are discouraged?
 - c. Share with me some incidents, stories, anecdotes that would illustrate.
7. What does this encouragement look like?
8. Do you encourage your students to bring their "identities" to class? To their learning? Think of some specific experiences, incidents, anecdotes that would help me visualize/understand.
9. What does this encouragement look like?
10. What is your understanding of the relationships between identity and learning?
 - a. Do some features of students' identities hinder learning? Share stories or incidents that would illuminate.
 - b. Do some features of students' identities promote learning? Share stories or incidents that would illuminate.
11. Are there specific characteristics of people's identity that make them more or less successful in school? Explain or think of some specific experiences, incidents, anecdotes that would help me visualize/understand.

APPENDIX 2

Table 1
Advantages to Insider Status (Chavez, 2008; p. 479)
Positionality
a) a nuanced perspective for observation, interpretation and representation
b) an equalized relationship between researcher and participants
c) expediency of rapport building
d) immediate legitimacy in the field
e) economy to acclimating to the field
Access
a) expediency of access
b) access to more in-group activities
Data Collection/Interpretation/Representation
a) insight into the linguistic, cognitive, emotional, sensory and psychological principles of participants
b) knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field
c) stimulation of natural interaction and behavior
d) detection of participants' hidden behaviors and perceptions
e) detection of nonverbal gestures of embarrassment and discomfort
f) detection of informants' actual behavior versus their performed selves
g) identification of unusual and unfamiliar occurrences

APPENDIX 3

Table 2			
<i>Percent of students who received: C+⁴⁶ (good) or Better</i>			
Subject	Montclair High School	District	Province
Mathematics 10	<35%	50%	45%
Science 10	<55%	65%	60%
Social Studies 11			
Total	60%	>65%	69%
Males	<55%	>60%	Unavailable
Females	75%	75%	Unavailable
English 12			
Total	<60%	70%	68%
Males	<55%	65%	Unavailable
Females	60%	>75%	Unavailable
Table 2			

⁴⁶ The letter grade C+ represents a mark range of 67- 72%.

APPENDIX 4



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Shields, C.M.		DEPARTMENT Educational Studies	NUMBER B06-0825
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT Other ,			
CO-INVESTIGATORS Sayani, Anish, Educational Studies			
SPONSORING AGENCIES Unfunded Research			
TITLE: Minoritized Student Identities, School Spaces, and Learning: A Narrative Inquiry			
APPROVAL DATE NOV 23 2006	TERM (YEARS) 1	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL Nov. 20, 2006, Assent form / Consent form / Contact letter / Sept. 28, 2006, Questionnaires	
<p>CERTIFICATION</p> <p>The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:</i> Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair, Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair</p> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>			