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# Race Talk in a Multicultural Canada: Canadian Children and the Racial Socialization Process

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Race Talk in a Multicultural Canada:  
Canadian Children and the Racial Socialization Process

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Race Talk in a Multicultural Canada: Canadian Children and the Racial Socialization Process**

There is a substantial amount of sociological scholarship on racial socialization, which scholars argue creates racial distinctions and differentiation, in the American context (Myers, 2005; Pollock, 2004). However, there are limited studies addressing racial socialization or “race talk” in the Canadian context. “Race talk” or the way people talk about race and racism not only reinforces racial hierarchies, but also ensures the persistence of racism (Meyers, 2005). This body of literature shows that understanding the different racialized ideas that white and racialized children are growing up with inevitably shapes race relations between children and subsequently adults. Even less scholarly work is to be found in Canada on related topics and how multiculturalism as a policy may be shaping people’s views of race in Canada, especially pertaining to colorblind ideologies (Bonilla Silva, 2018).

Given the current watershed historical moment in race relations in Canada, owing to heightened public discourse on racial injustices over the last year this research explores how families are engaging in racial socialization and the type of content that children are internalizing into their own racial consciousness. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 23 parents and 14 children in Alberta, this analysis demonstrates some key themes in the racial socialization that Canadian children are receiving from their families. These findings demonstrate the striking differences in the ways that white and racialized families teach their kids about inequality in a multicultural Canada. Using these findings this study also makes several suggestions for families in how to challenge existing structures of inequality and work towards an anti-racist future.

Keywords: family, race, socialization, children, multiculturalism.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Children's families, as well as the context in which children are growing up in, are significant aspects to analyze when looking at how and what children are learning about essential issues such as race, gender, and class in society. Racial differentiations and inequities are social facts that children are exposed to especially in white dominant and settler colonialist societies such as Canada. Children's understanding of the issue is however, often centered on the racial dynamic and landscape of the country and city that they live in. Children learn about race from a number of institutions, one of the main ones being their immediate and surrounding family. Families attempt to contribute to the racial socialization process of their children including a number of behaviours and ideologies such as how to act in specific settings, what behaviour is acceptable for their age, and differing perspectives on societal issues. Included in the socialization that children are involved in is also how they are taught about issues like race. There are numerous studies that come out of the United States (U.S.) that generally look at how families attempt to teach their children about issues of race. However, the majority of this research focuses on racialized minority families (Chakawa and Høglund, 2016). There is not nearly the same amount of research addressing how white families are discussing these issues with their children (Chakawa and Høglund, 2016). In comparison, the scholarly work on how Canadian children are involved in the process of racial socialization is sparse. Even less scholarly work provides the Canadian context and relates it to Canada's multiculturalism policy. It is important to examine Canadian families as they exist in a unique context given Canada's political commitment to multiculturalism that undoubtedly influences the way parents and educational institutions contribute to the racial socialization process of children and subsequently, how their children understand and internalize issues of race and racism in Canada.

The distinctive character of Canada as officially a multicultural nation and its settler colonial roots make it essential that sociologists and families have a better understanding of the way in which the Canadian context influences racial socialization practices and furthermore, how these racial ideologies contribute to or challenge existing structures of inequality. In addition, due to the lack of studies looking at both racialized and white families, researchers should also analyze the ways in which different racial and ethnic families are involved in the process of racial socialization and the ways in which they may differ in their practices and teachings in Canada. Considering that there may be significant differences in racial socialization between varying contexts it is also important to discuss what exactly is being referred to by racial socialization.

### **What is Racial Socialization?**

A central focus in racial socialization literature is the definition and characteristics of racial socialization. One reason for this is that racial socialization encompasses many different practices and ideologies, and therefore it is challenging to develop one consistent definition of the concept. Broadly speaking, racial socialization refers to the practices of parents and the discussions parents have with their children in regards to race and racism (Peters, 1985; Hughes et al. 2006). However, within the literature many scholars take this definition and fine tune it to emphasize different aspects of racial socialization (Hagerman, 2018; Winkler, 2012; Hughes et al. 2006).

The classical definition of racial socialization was coined by Peters, who defines the concept as “a set of overt and covert behaviours parents use, over and above those responsibilities shared by all parents, to psychologically prepare children for success in a racially stratified American society” (1985, p.562). As emphasized in the definition, other scholars also agree that parental cultural socialization practices are distinct from other general parenting practices for both the majority and minority groups (Chakawa and Hogg, 2016). While this definition effectively

communicates what scholars are talking about when they say racial socialization, current studies and literature have expanded upon this definition to include not only issues of ethnicity but also children's agency in learning and accepting these teachings.

Hughes et al. (2006) points out that the classical term "racial socialization" emerged from studies conducted with African Americans in order to understand how these parents were socializing their children to maintain their self-esteem and prepare them to understand and cope with racial barriers. In comparison, ethnic socialization emanated from studies that focused on groups teaching their children cultural retention, identity achievement, and how to face pressures of assimilation (Hughes et al. 2006). In addition, research on ethnic socialization also resulted in the expansion of racial groups included (Hughes et al. 2006). Hughes et al. (2006) point out that technically both racial and ethnic socialization apply to all groups of people as everyone belongs to both a racial and an ethnic group. As a result, families will engage in both racial and ethnic socialization practices, some of which are very similar. This makes distinguishing between the two rather difficult. This is why Hughes et al. (2006) explains that rather than debating and attempting to distinguish between the two types of socialization the authors would benefit from combining them and referring to any of the socialization practices as *ethnic-racial socialization*.

In this research, I do not utilize Hughes et al. (2006) definition of ethnic-racial socialization but remain cognizant of the ways in which race and ethnicity may be intertwined in the way parents try to teach their children about inequality in Canada. While theories of ethnicity rather than race and racialization are used more widely in Canada when talking about racialized immigrants (Lalonde, Jones and Stroink, 2008), previous literature also demonstrates the ways in which ethnicity and culture are racialized (Waters, 1996; Simpson et al., 2011). Mary Waters (1996) explains that even though whites have an ethnicity, they still have a great deal of choice in terms



of their ethnicity. More specifically, they have the option of identifying an ancestry or just being “white” or “American”. However, for people of colour ethnicity can become a tool of alienation in that they are assumed to not be American, or in the case of this study, not Canadian (Waters, 1996). Racial minorities’ lives are strongly influenced by their race and ethnicity, even when they choose not to identify with a certain ancestry (Waters, 1996). For racial minorities, they do not have the option of choosing to be “just American”, rather race and alienation is attached to them. This is also the case in the Canadian context in which scholars note that there is a hierarchy in which “Canadian” is assumed to refer to white (Simpson et al., 2011). As a result, while ethnicity plays a significant role in how children learn about racial inequality, the focus of this study is to analyze how families contribute to the racial socialization process help children understand race and racism.

Furthermore, most definitions of racial socialization place an emphasis on the practices that are conducted by the parents or guardians. However, this is not shared by all scholars working within the field of racial socialization. Winkler (2012) argues that “racial socialization” is a passive term which claims that this is simply something that happens to children. The author points out that current literature surrounding racial socialization is limited in that it only focuses on the agents of socialization rather than the children and their interpretations of the teachings (Winkler, 2012). Therefore, Winkler promotes *comprehensive racial learning*, which is “the process through which children negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of the various and conflicting messages they receive about race, ultimately forming their own understandings of how race works in society and their lives”( 2012, p.7). This definition of racial socialization deviates from typical definitions of the social process in two ways. First, Winkler points out that the “comprehensive” aspect of the concept acknowledges multiple influencers rather than simply focusing on the parents. This not

only includes the role of the family in teaching children about issues of race and racism, but also other institutional bodies such as the media and school. This places children in a dynamic society rather than assuming they only learn from family. Secondly, “learning” implies that children play an active, ongoing role in the development of ideas regarding race and racism. Hagerman (2017) draws on Winkler’s definition in her own study on the racial socialization of white children. She claims that rather than assuming children to be like sponges, they are able to comprehend and decide what they believe and what is important to their interpretation of a concept or idea (Hagerman, 2017).

In this study I adopt Winkler’s definition of comprehensive racial learning and use it as a jumping off point to inform the methodology of this research. While Winkler’s definition is a departure from the classical definition of racial socialization, throughout the study I still use the terminology of the racial socialization process. One of the main reasons that I choose to use the racial socialization process over racial learning is that in order to be true to Winkler’s comprehensive racial learning I would have had to conduct true ethnographic research children’s schools, with their friends, and other individuals in their community to really account for the various people and institutions that children learn about race from. However, due to the constraints of this study (both in terms of the length of the project and Covid-19 restrictions) this was not realistic or plausible. Therefore, I focused primarily on the parents and their children while simultaneously asking them about the differing contexts in which their children are immersed in. Secondly, I continue to use the racial socialization process to bring attention to the fact that while children learn from a variety of places in society, parents up to a certain age are still responsible for placing their children in those various contexts. This includes deciding what school their children will attend or the friends that they are allowed to hang out with. In addition, due to the

global pandemic at the time and strict restrictions in Alberta, children were spending more than usual time at home with their parents. As a result, I use Winker's definition of comprehensive racial learning as a base for developing and understanding how Canadian families teach their children about race in this study. However, I still use the language of racial socialization throughout the theoretical background and literature review as the previous scholars I reference use that construction in their studies and research.

In addition to defining racial socialization, scholars address various aspects of the concept including which groups engage in it (Hagerman, 2018; Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016; Hughes et al. 2006), and the types of racial socialization practices parents engage in with their children (Hughes and Chen, 1997; Hagerman, 2017; Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Some of the first studies conducted on racial socialization in the U.S. focused on African American families (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016; Hughes et al. 2006; Burton et al. 2010). However, since then studies have expanded to include other racial groups and also consider new perspectives. Generally, studies show that minority families report engaging in racial socialization practices more frequently than majority families (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Racial socialization can take on a number of forms including *valuing heritage and culture*, *emphasizing racial barriers*, *emphasizing pluralism*, and *promoting colour-blindness* (Hughes and Chen, 1997; Hagerman, 2017; Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Hughes et al. (2006) divides the types of socialization practices into four main practices: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust and egalitarianism.

*Cultural socialization* refers to practices that encourage and promote cultural customs, traditions, and pride (Hughes et al. 2006). These may commonly be transmitted through daily routines, and as a result may also be the most common across racial and ethnic groups (Hughes et

al. 2006). This type of racial socialization is found to be more concentrated among immigrant families as they attempt to retain their culture in the face of pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Chakawa and Hoglund (2016) demonstrate that within Canada some racial and ethnic groups may have issues of cultural socialization practices due to lasting effects of colonialism. The authors note that Indigenous parents mainly experience these difficulties due to the historical loss of culture as a result of colonialism and residential schooling (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). The lasting effects of trauma from colonialism have contributed to and maintained the hegemonic whiteness within Canadian society. This in turn contributes greatly to which groups are more likely to face obstacles of discrimination and prejudice and therefore, are pushed to teach their children about issues of race and racism.

Living in a racially stratified society certain families have to prepare their children to face experiences of discrimination, prejudice and oppression. This is more common among racialized, minority families compared to white families (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016; Hughes et al. 2006). *Preparation for bias*, another racial socialization practice, is not as common as cultural socialization, however, researchers acknowledge that this may be due to the fact that individuals may not feel as comfortable speaking freely about this in interviews as compared to other racial socialization practices (Hughes et al. 2006). Preparation for bias refers to the ways in which parents teach and discuss potential experiences of discrimination, and prejudice with their children (Hughes et al. 2006). This may include experiences of racism as well as racial barriers in the form of systemic racism (Hughes et al. 2006). Furthermore, preparation for bias may also involve parents' recognition of their group disadvantage both systemically or in regards to societal images or stereotypes (Hughes and Chen, 1997).

Related to preparation for bias, is another form of racial socialization referred to as *promotion of mistrust*. This practice refers to the same concepts and ideas as mentioned in preparation for bias, however, more specifically addresses the bias they may experience from other racial groups, as well as individuals that are likely to perpetrate them (Hughes et al. 2006). In addition, the two types are also differentiated on the basis that promotion of mistrust does not include mechanisms for coping and managing experiences of discrimination (Hughes et al. 2006). The promotion of mistrust may include comments or narratives that criticize racialized groups due to colour, culture, and/or religion, slurs or epithets, and stereotypes (Hughes et al. 2006).

The last form of racial socialization is *egalitarianism* or *silencing of race* (Hughes et al. 2006). Interestingly, in Hughes et al. (2006), the authors explain that under the framework of egalitarianism is *mainstream socialization*. This type of socialization includes orientating children towards skills and characteristics that are needed to thrive in settings which are part of the dominant culture (Hughes et al. 2006). This type of racial socialization is noted to be more common among white families, as compared to racialized and visible minority families (Hughes et al. 2006). While the authors argue that this mainstream socialization may include practices of colour-blindness (Hughes et al. 2006), it also seems to imply practices of assimilation.

### **Context of the Current Research**

Much of this research comes out of studies done in the U.S. and while it provides some insight into what racial socialization may look like in the Canadian context, there is little research that specifically looks at what types of racial socialization practices and teachings are utilized by Canadian families. Furthermore, while this research demonstrates some of the differences in how racialized and white families engage in racial socialization there are little studies that look at this in the Canadian context and how Canada's national identity as a multicultural country may impact

teachings between different racial groups. Furthermore, the current era of racial dynamics and tension may also provide a unique context as increased awareness and attention on Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements and the uncovering of residential school gravesites has placed families in positions where it is nearly impossible not to be aware of racial inequality in the country. Studies demonstrate that current events such as the shooting of Black youth influences the ways in which parents engage in racial socialization and their conversations on race (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015). This study explores how Canadian children, both racialized and white, are engaged in the racial socialization process in the current era of racial division and tension, as well as increased and wide-spread media attention on racial justice movements such as BLM or the discoveries of continued racial atrocities in Canada in the form of mass graves on the sites of residential schools of thousands of Indigenous children.

Utilizing qualitative semi-structured interviews with both parents and their children, this study more directly explores how Canadian parents in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta are engaging in the racial socialization process of their children and what content their children are internalizing about race in Canada. The families that were interviewed included middle-class families with children between the ages of eight and twelve, and have lived in Canada for a significant amount of time. These families were specifically chosen to be interviewed as previous research demonstrates that affluent families have more resources in terms of providing their children with extra-curricular activities, tutoring and other social engagements (Lareau, 2011; Hagerman, 2018). As a result, middle to upper middle class families may have more time and resources to work on intentionally placing their children into certain contexts that contribute to how they learn about societal issues. Lareau's (2011) work explains that middle class families may engage in more concerted cultivation in which they plan the development of their children through

organized activities. In comparison, working class families are not able to focus on concerted cultivation since for them responsibilities of parenthood are concentrated in providing for their children leaving them little time to develop their children's feelings, opinions and thoughts about social issues (Lareau, 2011) which I argue include opinions on race and racialization. Additionally, middle to upper middle class families with children between the ages of eight and twelve have more resources to put them in activities that fosters the racial socialization of the children as they begin to spend more time outside of their home and with more heterogenous groups (Hagerman, 2018). Furthermore, families in Alberta were specifically chosen because it provides a unique and interesting context in which to analyze how children may be learning about both race and ethnicity. Alberta has one of the largest influx of immigrants in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017). In addition, it also has a long history of racial discrimination and violence on Indigenous communities which has resulted in lasting impacts on the racial dynamic in the province (Stote, 2012). Edmonton, Calgary and surrounding areas of both cities are specifically looked at as reports demonstrate that roughly 91% of visible minorities live in these two cities, with Calgary having the highest proportion (Alberta Government, 2011). As a result, these two cities provide an interesting context in which families may be teaching their children about issues of race, ethnicity, immigrants, and discrimination.

The key findings of this study explain the significant differences in how white and racialized families approach racial socialization with their children. Furthermore, the key findings also demonstrate the importance of "feeling race" and how that may impact both the teaching and learning of racial inequality and discrimination. Each of the chapters in this thesis goes over a key theme in the family interviews, including the ways in which race talk in regards to specific issues either supports or challenges colour-blind ideologies of Canadian children. Based on in-depth

qualitative interviews with 23 parents and 14 children in Alberta (11 parents of color and 12 white parents and 7 white children and 7 children of color), my analysis reveals three key findings. First, in comparison to previous research, the parents in this study did not deny the existence of racial inequality in Canada. On the contrary, the majority of parents had several critiques about Canada's multiculturalism policy and how it is enacted in the country. Second, while both racialized and white parents worked to make sure their children were aware of the racially unjust society they live in, white parents did not go further to teach their children how to actively disinvest from whiteness and address their privilege. And lastly, regardless of the parents' views and ideas on multiculturalism and race in Canada, the children of these families still presented a colour-blind ideology and were colour mute (Pollock, 2004).

The findings point at a key theoretical insight on racial socialization in Canada. Racial consciousness in parents may not be the most effective in dismantling (colorblind) racial ideologies in children but taking on a proactive and continued stance to divest from whiteness may be the only way of raising racially conscious children. In order to promote racial equity and change, white families should attempt to learn from the experiences of racialized families through studies such as this one. The key findings of this study not only fill in a gap in racial socialization research but also present useful and beneficial suggestions for white families in Canada. It is on white parents to teach their children not only about the racial inequality in the country, but also specific ways in which they can disinvest from whiteness and engage in anti-racist advocacy. In order to raise anti-racist children, white parents need to engage with their children at a young age about issues of race and inequality in Canadian society.



## **CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Socialization is one of the fundamental theories of sociology, and one that is part of every introductory sociology course. Socialization is a lifelong process through which individuals learn and internalize the norms, values and ideologies of the societies that they are a part of (Macionis, 2013). These norms and ideologies are bounded by the larger structures such as gender and race that shape society. Gender scholars (Fausto-Sterling, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1987) used theories of socialization to argue against gender essentialism. They argued that gender is internalized through a process of learning about gender norms that starts in early childhood through parents, teachers and other institutional members of the society (Fausto-Sterling, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1987). In the same refrain, race theorists have shown the primacy of racial socialization in the process of how race is constructed in the society. Several processes are part of racial socialization as discussed in the introduction including “race talk” that has been shown to be a key link in how racial socialization takes place between social actors including parents and children (Myers, 2005). My research focuses on the conversations that parents and children have about race in Canada making race talk and racial socialization two lenses for my research.

### **Racial Socialization and Race Talk**

As introduced in the previous chapter, racial socialization can take on a number of practices and forms. The varying types of racial socialization, such as preparation for bias and promotion of colour-blindness, are all transmitted to children through the practice of race talk. Not talking about race also communicates certain messages to children as well (Pollock, 2004). This makes race talk or the lack of it a significant aspect of analysis in racial socialization studies. To reiterate, racial socialization is the process by which parents teach their children about race and racism. “Race talk” or the way individuals talk about race and racism is significant in relation to racial

socialization because the conversations parents are having with their children may work to reinforce racial hierarchies and reproduce racism or to dismantle them (Myers, 2005). Depending on the race talk, racial socialization creates racial distinctions and differentiations among groups of people (Hagerman, 2018; Myers, 2005). Myers (2005) explains that race talk can embody a number of forms, including talk that is used to denigrate any person due to colour, culture, and/or religion, slurs or epithets, celebrating racial and ethnic pride, language that conceals a racialized assumption, and any form that denies the importance of race. Analyzing these discussions also provides some insight into the persistence of racial division in a society (Myers, 2005). Race talk in families means that racialized notions about groups of people are being passed down to the next generation, therefore maintaining the persistence of racism (Myers, 2005). Myers (2005) explains that “the power of language transcends individual conversations to shape the ways that we think about others and, eventually, the ways that we act towards them”. She goes on to discuss the ways in which the language we use when it comes to issues of race can be used to empower some groups at the cost of others (Myers, 2005). Therefore, the way in which families are talking to their children about race, whether directly or indirectly, impacts how children are thinking about these same issues and potentially how they treat other individuals in different racial and ethnic groups. It is for these reasons that scholars in both the American and Canadian context have explored the various ways in which parents engage in the socialization process with their children on issues of race, ethnicity and racism. The significance of my research is that understanding the different racialized ideas that white and racialized children are growing up with inevitably shapes race relations between children and subsequently adults. In Canada this is especially intriguing as there is a strong rhetoric of multiculturalism and promoting diversity which may impact how parents talk to their children about race and how their children think about race.

## **Multiculturalism and Colorblind Ideology**

A large body of literature argues that the Canadian context is significantly different than the American one, and therefore warrants scholarly research into how the Canadian context may impact racial socialization practices in families. Scholars such as argue that in the Canadian context there is more of a focus on ethnicity rather than race (Lalonde, Jones and Stroink, 2008). This may be due to the fact that slavery was not critical in the development of the Canadian economy and also not central to defining Canadian race relations (Lalonde, Jones and Stroink, 2008). However, central to both Canadian identity and race and ethnic relations in the country is its official multiculturalism policy. Since its inception in 1971 the policy has evolved and re-framed its focus, reference point and mandate (Kunz and Sykes, 2009). Kunz and Sykes (2009) outline the focus of multiculturalism during each decade since its inception, starting from celebrating difference in the 1970's, managing diversity in the 1980's, constructive engagement in the 1990's and now focusing on inclusive citizenship in the 2000's. More specifically, multiculturalism originated from a point of culture and encouraged individuals to participate in Canadian society and valuing their cultural identities (Kunz and Sykes, 2009). In the 1980's, it evolved away from the celebration of cultures and focused on the removal of barriers to economic participation for racial minorities at the institutional level (Kunz and Sykes, 2009). Eventually, multiculturalism changed to address issues of society building and Canadian identity, focusing on fostering a shared citizenship and sense of belonging for all Canadians (Kunz and Sykes, 2009). These themes of inclusion and diversity are also seen at the international level when looking at Canada's global and national identity.

The Canadian context is a unique one due to the tension between Canada's global image as a benevolent country and the realities of racial dynamics and relations within the country. Canada's national identity is one that is defined "according to its global role as a 'peace keeper',

its inclusiveness as a society, and its sense of being distinct from its giant neighbor to the South” (Potter, 2009, p.4). Several scholars point out that the Canadian image focuses on discussions of immigrant integration, multiculturalism and social cohesion (Jedwab, 2008; Comeau and Allahar, 2001; Potter 2009). However, as Potter (2009) points out, while Canada did engage in benevolent global relations by the late 1990’s Canada’s contributions to the United Nations significantly decreased but the myth persisted. This myth of a country that is benevolent, peaceful and inclusive served as a means of reinforcing national unity, and in coherence with Canada’s multiculturalism policy it projected an image of tolerance (Potter, 2009). Canada’s multiculturalism policy states that Canada promotes and recognizes cultural and racial diversity, the freedom of all its members to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage, and the expectation of equal participation in economic, political, social and cultural institutions (Canada Justice Laws, 1988). Multiculturalism in Canada has largely been consolidated in dominant discourse and has become an essential aspect of the national identity (Winter, 2014). Some scholars point out that Canada is really a nation in denial (Comeau and Allahar, 2001). Specifically, that this denial is based on a myth of equality in which Canadians assume they are classless, and refuse to acknowledge the existence of systemic and structural inequalities that are integrated into Canadian society (Comeau and Allahar, 2001). Comeau and Allahar (2001) argue that this denial is actually a key part of the national mythology of Canada as a benign, innocent country.

Although there is strong discourse of Canada being tolerant and multicultural, numerous studies have demonstrated the reality of racial and ethnic discrimination in the country. Regardless of Canada’s Multiculturalism policy, every day and institutional discrimination against visible minorities remains a well-documented social problem in Canada (Godley, 2018; Lund, 2006; Beagan and Etowa, 2009). Canada is and continues to be steeped in colonialism and racism (Simpson

et al., 2011). Simpson et al. (2011) points out that throughout history and currently the racialization of visible minorities happens in a variety of areas including historical issues, education, representations, media and popular culture. Racialization, as described by Simpson et al. (2011), is the way individuals and institutions categorize and treat people in racial terms. Racialization is also a significant component of colonialism (Simpson et al., 2011; Ahmed, 2002). Ahmed (2002) explains that bodies are embedded with a racial identity through multiple processes, ones that invest skin colour with meaning. She also unravels the shift from “race” to the use of “ethnicity” in official discourse of multiculturalism and how this often means the forgetting of histories of violence (Ahmed, 2002). Racialization, as also pointed out by Simpson et al. (2011), is connected to histories of European colonialism. Simpson et al. (2001) tease out the way in which immigration policies are a central lens through which to understand how racialization operates in Canada. Rather than integrating newcomers into Canadian society, some scholars argue that instead they may be slowly assimilated into the dominant culture (Ertorer et al, 2020). One study found that immigrants still experience racial and ethnic discrimination issues such as the ethnic name barrier, not having their credentials recognized, assimilation and stereotyping (Ertorer et al. 2020). Throughout this study, I refer to families of colour as racialized families in order to bring attention to this process of racialization and its deep connection to colonial violence in Canada. While white families are also racialized, although quite differently, I continue to refer to them as white families as to bring light to the privilege and access to power that they have over racialized families.

A significant amount of research looking at racism in both the U.S. and Canada points out that while there is still overt acts of racism, racism in contemporary times takes on a new form that is colour-blind. Bonilla-Silva demonstrates that the “new racism” takes the form of colour-blind racism. In the post-civil rights era, it is argued that out right racism has become less prominent in

comparison to the Jim Crow era. However, that does not mean that racism ceases to exist. Rather, many scholars focusing on contemporary race and ethnic relations work within the field of colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Mueller, 2017; Burke, 2016). Color-blind racism, as Bonilla-Silva argues, "...serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege..." (2018, p.3). Colour-blind racism explains how whites have developed explanations of racial inequality that denies any responsibility or wrongdoing for the status of racialized people (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This type of racism focuses on non-racial dynamics compared to the Jim Crow era which claimed that Blacks inferior status was due to their biological and moral inferiority. Colourblindness shields whites so that they can express resentment, inferior morality, values and work ethics of minorities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In addition, it allows them to claim to be victims of "reverse racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Bonilla-Silva demonstrates and provides evidence for the four frames of colour-blind racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The frame of *abstract liberalism* involves using ideas related to political and economic liberalism to explain racial issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This frame often ignores the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind issues such as segregation and being unconcerned about the negative consequences of these practices for minorities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). *Naturalization* as a frame allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). *Cultural racism* on the other hand argues that the standing of minorities in society relies on culturally based explanations (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Bonilla-Silva argues that biological views have been replaced with cultural ones that are effective in maintaining the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The last frame is *minimization*

*of racism* suggests discrimination is longer as issue affecting minorities' life chances and opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This frame involves viewing racism as exclusively all-out racist behavior, and ignores much of the “new racism” actions and practices conducted by individuals and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Utilizing these understandings of colour-blind racism, research can come to understand the various ways in which racialized families experience and feel racism and the ways in which whites utilize the “new racism” to maintain their privileges.

Compared to overt, hostile racism, colourblindness refers to an ideological and institutional discrimination that whites may utilize to talk about race without seeming racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Both whites and racialized individuals may participate and contribute to colour-blind racism, however, the impact of this discrimination is felt differently depending on the racialization of the person. As a result, the experiences and interactions that parents have with racialized institutions and structures will inevitably impact their understanding of institutional racism and subsequently how they then pass down these ideologies to the next generation. In Canada, I suspect that this may mean that the strong rhetoric of multiculturalism and diversity may impact how parents are teaching their children about race and ethnicity in the country. Additionally, depending on the decade in which parents learned about multiculturalism and how that has shaped their own understanding of the concept, they may teach it to their children from different mandates or focuses. For instance, if parents have a strong conceptualization of multiculturalism from the 1980's they may focus on equal economic and political participation compared to the focus of citizenship in the 1990's and 2000's (Kunz and Sykes, 2009). More specifically, strong rhetoric's of colourblindness and multiculturalism may influence families' attitudes and behaviours towards other groups of people in Canada. Previous studies looking at how colourblindness and multiculturalism impact prejudice towards outgroups found that both these ideologies may be

beneficial for intergroup relations (Rattan and Ambady, 2013; Sasaki and Vorauer, 2013). Sasaki and Vorauer (2013) explain that in non-threatening circumstances multiculturalism promoted more positive attitudes and behaviours, however, this does not hold up in scenarios where a group has a perceived threat or high prejudice of the other group. Regardless, a multiculturalism ideology generally promoted greater attention and responsiveness to outgroup members (Sasaki and Vorauer, 2013). In comparison, this same study found that colourblindness may also have positive effects but these were generally in the short term as these efforts can be taxing and difficult to sustain (Sasaki and Vorauer, 2013). Rattan and Ambady (2013) note that minority groups are less likely to endorse colour-blind ideologies compared to majority groups. While there are several studies comparing how the ideologies of multiculturalism and colourblindness impact racial attitudes and behaviours, minimal research specifically looks at how colourblindness operates in a multicultural society or the impact that promoting multiculturalism may have on colour-blind ideologies. For instance, perhaps a strong focus on tolerating and accepting difference may also result in children believing that race and ethnicity do not matter in a multicultural society. This could potentially lead to a colour-blind understanding of race in Canada.

What is interesting is that although racial discrimination and prejudice at the institutional level is shown to exist and work in covert, sometimes unnoticeable or subconscious ways, there is still a substantial amount of literature that argues that improved intergroup relations can be achieved through intergroup contact. Researchers working in contact theory argue that there is more to it than simply contact. Rather, scholars explain that there are several conditions under which this contact needs to occur in order to reduce racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination. Pettigrew (1998) explains that in order for contact theory to work it needs to include four conditions: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law



or customs. Furthermore, he expands off of Allport's original four conditions and adds that in order to mediate attitude change individuals need to learn about the outgroup in order to correct negative views (Pettigrew, 1998).

Further research has looked at the specific ways in which intergroup contact works to reduce prejudice. A review done by Ramiah and Hewstone (2013) identified four main ways. First, intergroup contact works to reduce anxieties between groups, which in turn reduces prejudices or negative feelings about the other group (Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013). Secondly, contact between different groups may induce empathic feelings towards one another (Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013). They note that more effective and beneficial is if individuals from different groups form a friendship and their empathy grows (Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013). The more groups interact the more they also learn about each other and their different cultures and races (Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013). However, the authors point out that this mediation is not as strong as the first two. Lastly, Ramiah and Hewstone (2013) add that intergroup contact also works to reduce both symbolic and realistic group threat.

While there is a substantial amount of research which argues for the benefits and effectiveness of intergroup contact, some also point out that contact may not always have a positive aspect to it (Rubin and Lannutti, 2001). Rubin and Lannutti (2001) argue that in order for higher status groups to support the disadvantaged group they need to be aware of historical injustices and present-day inequalities. Otherwise, in cases where groups have a history of inequality and racial injustice, contact that has positive outcomes may give the participating groups a false sense of conflict resolution or action (Rubin and Lannutti, 2001). This in turn can result in groups believing that underlying socio-political inequalities are not as prominent and impactful as they are to

racialized individuals (Rubin and Lannutti, 2001). This may very well be the case in a country that promotes a strong rhetoric of multiculturalism and racial equality.

This means that intergroup contact is especially significant to consider in racially and ethnically diverse contexts such as Canada. Canadian families especially in urban contexts are constantly in contact with individuals and groups from different cultures and races. This inevitably influencing and impacting their views and ideologies on others. Contact can be a child's first introduction into a new group of people, however, children learn about issues of race, racism, and discrimination from numerous sources and institutions. There is plenty of research that looks at the varying and differing ways that children learn about these issues from institutions such as schools, media, their peers, and their families.

### **Children and Race**

Studies analyzing the ways in which children understand or make meaning out of race talk in their lives includes family settings as well as several other contexts outside of the home. Several studies have looked at how children understand issues of race and racism in settings such as their schools and among their peers (Pollock, 2004; Perry 2001; Risman and Banerjee, 2013). One study done by Pollock (2004) analyzed the ways in which youth in American schools struggled over when race should matter. The study demonstrates the ways in which race talk and being silent about race both make race matter in their lives (Pollock, 2004). The youth talked about issues such as racial categories, addressing issues of race through communal approaches, and also the problems that come out of being silent about race (Pollock, 2004). Pollock (2004) argues for the significance of critiquing race talk in studies looking at racial socialization and the risk and care that goes into doing race talk well. Pollock (2004), similar to other racial socialization studies, in

some ways addresses the way in which colorblindness influences and permeates children's racial consciousness.

Risman and Banerjee's study (2013) on how tween-agers in the U.S. understand race in their everyday lives also utilizes frameworks of colorblindness. Utilizing Winkler's definition of racial socialization, Risman and Banerjee (2013) demonstrate the ways in which children both inherit and reinterpret ideas of race and racism based on their own experiences and interactions. Specifically, the authors examine how American children understand and discuss how race matters in their everyday lives. What is significant about this study is that it differs from previous ones by utilizing an intersectional approach to analyze the ways in which the tween-agers use the colour-blind rhetoric in how they talk about race (Risman and Banerjee, 2013). They find that contrary to previous literature, the children in their study acknowledge that race matters and additionally, used narratives related to privilege and discrimination (Risman and Banerjee, 2013). While the children discussed inequality they did not go further to articulate the connection between individual experiences of racism and larger structural inequalities (Risman and Banerjee, 2013). However, one could argue that this is due to the age specific racial socialization practices employed by societal institutions. Other studies find that when younger children are taught about race they are more likely to receive messages promoting egalitarianism and equality between different groups (Hughes et al. 2006) In comparison, older children are believed to be better equipped to understand and cope with racial barriers and experiences of discrimination (Hughes et al. 2006).

More recent studies have begun to include and analyze the ways in which white children understand both race and white supremacy in society. In her book *White Kids*, Hagerman (2018) points out that ideology is an important component in understanding both how dominant racist ideologies are reproduced and reconstituted through the collective denial of structural inequalities.

Hagerman (2018) addresses the question of how ideologies are socially reproduced by children who benefit the most from the maintenance of racist ideologies, and how these positions shape the choices involved in raising children (Hagerman, 2018). While there are significant differences in the ways in which white families engage in the racial socialization process with their children compared to racialized families (Hagerman, 2017), an essential area of concern in white racial socialization is privilege. Specifically, Hagerman (2018) discusses what she refers to as the *conundrum of privilege* which explains how white parents may be concerned with cultivating anti-racist praxis while also still receiving unearned white advantage and privileges.

Perry's (2001) study looking at white youth and their construction of their race also addresses issues of privilege. This study analyzes the ways in which white youth in two high schools construct their whiteness as "cultureless". She argues that claims like this have whites assert themselves as superior (Perry, 2001). Not only is it significant to understand that whites see themselves as cultureless but also that this lack of cultural ties removes whites from the past and are seen as "postcultural" (Perry, 2001). This means that white children are learning that not only are they "without" culture but also that being white is "normal" while having a certain culture or race makes one "ethnic". Studies looking at the racial socialization of white children bring attention to the ways in which societal institutions reaffirm their privilege and colorblind ideologies.

Other studies looking at children and learning about race have explored the various practices and race talk that parents use and how these may translate into certain racial comprehensions in their children. One study focusing on white American mothers and their racial socialization practices found that children's racial attitudes were related to their perception of their parents' attitudes (Vittrup, 2018). Only in families where parents were having meaningful

conversations with their children about race did the children's attitudes match the parents' (Vittrup, 2018). Further research analyzing the racial socialization of children also analyzes the relation between racial socialization and racial identity with racialized adolescents' coping strategies when it comes to experiences of discrimination (Scott, 2003). Scott (2003) found that the frequency of racial socialization that African American adolescents received was related to the use of approach coping strategies and unrelated to avoidance coping strategies. Overall, African American adolescents that did receive more frequent racial socialization from their parents were better equipped to cope with discrimination including telling a family member about their experience or by relying on personal knowledge and resources to deal with it (Scott, 2003). This again points to the significance of parental racial socialization practices and teachings in comparison to other institutions that children may interact and learn from.

### **Parental Racial Socialization**

Children learn about issues of race and racism not just from their parents but from a variety of different institutions in society, including the media, their schools, their peers, and other individuals in the community. However, parents play a unique and critical role in the development of their children's racial consciousness (Hagerman, 2018; Zucker and Patterson 2018; Brown and Lesane Brown 2006). While other institutions, like schools and the media, intermingle and exert their own influences over children's understanding of race, parents are children's initial exposure to racial ideologies and racial frames (Hagerman, 2018; Zucker and Patterson 2018; Brown and Lesane Brown 2006). Myers (2005) points out that one of the ways in which children learn about race is through race talk. She also notes that race talk is "contagious" and easily spreads from person to person (Myers, 2005). While making racialized remarks is currently punishable in public spaces, racialized thinking has not left individuals imaginations but rather has become more

discreet (Myers, 2005). Therefore, race talk still endures in private spaces like family homes (Myers, 2005). Myers (2005) articulates that understanding the race talk that happens in families helps to understand how old racialized ideas are passed from generation to generation. In addition, while parents' race talk may be passed down to their children, their kids are also learning about these issues in other contexts such as their schools, peers and the media. Here, parents also play a significant role as they are responsible for deciding the types of other institutions that their children interact and engage with (Hagerman, 2018). For instance, parents play a role in deciding what school their child attends, what neighborhood they reside in and may restrict the amount and type of media that their child takes in. Due to the central and prominent role parents play in developing their children's racial consciousness and ideologies, they are an essential point of analysis. Many studies have expanded to look at the various ways in which different families engage in racial socialization.

Hagerman (2017) points out that it is children's interactions in these contexts that shape their racial consciousness and understanding. Her study analyzing how progressive, affluent white fathers in the U.S. teach their children to be "antiracists" explains that these fathers believed that teaching their white children about race was more about intergroup contact and less about interrogating the structural privilege they experienced as white individuals (Hagerman, 2017). The fathers ensured intergroup contact through practices such as cross-racial friendships, racially diverse classrooms and extracurricular activities, and certain kinds of volunteer and travel experiences (Hagerman, 2017). The white fathers in this study believed that these experiences would teach their children about the struggles of others which would in turn help them to appreciate the privileges they experienced (Hagerman, 2017). However, Hagerman (2017) notes that while

these fathers sometimes unintentionally supported the framework of hegemonic whiteness, they also attempted to dismantle white supremacy and domination.

Other studies looking at the ways in which white families engage in racial socialization found that in some cases white mothers would argue for the importance of having conversations on race with their children but then focus on unrelated issues (Vittrup, 2018). Even in instances where these white mothers did talk about race these topics were discussed as historical events rather than ongoing, consistent issues in society, this reinforcing colour-blind ideologies (Vittrup, 2018). Vittrup (2018) notes that one of the main reasons for parents' reluctance to discuss race lied in their perception of their child's lack of bias. That is, they would be less motivated to engage in racial discussions if they believed their child would never say anything negatively or discriminative in regards to race (Vittrup, 2018).

Megan Underhill (2018) also analyzed the ways in which white parents talk to their children about racial inequality, especially during a time in which racial inequality was prominent in racial protests and news coverage. She finds that compared to racialized families who try to prepare their children for bias and discrimination, the majority of white parents in her study were silent about race (Underhill, 2018). More specifically, the white parents noted that they did not talk to their children about race for several reasons, including that their children did not ask, they did not know what to say, and they wanted to protect their children (Underhill, 2018). Underhill (2018) discovers that for these parents being a "good white" parent is associated with being non-racist and colour-blind. As a result, their kid's childhood is structured by racial silence and white parents may not consider the racialized consequences of their silence (Underhill, 2018).

In comparison, for racialized families, specifically Black and African American families, this same privilege of avoiding race is not afforded to them (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015).

Thomas and Blackmon (2015) demonstrate that for African American families in the U.S. their racial socialization practices are in part influenced by current events, like the shooting of Trayvon Martin. Parents in this study noted that they perceived being Black in the U.S. as a risk with the possibility of violence and even death (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015). Some parents in the study discussed the need to protect Black youth, as well as the explicit behaviour changes they needed to engage in to ensure that their children were safe (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015). These practices included guidelines on what to wear, walking with others, and how to respond to authority figures and strangers that their youth interact with (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015). The authors explain that the shooting of Trayvon Martin spurred fear in the parents about the racism and discrimination their children would have to face and as a result impacted the racial socialization of their children (Thomas and Blackmon, 2015).

Parental racial socialization studies have also looked at how racial socialization may differ in bi-racial or mixed-race families. Rollins and Hunter (2013) analyzed the different ways in which mothers engage in racial socialization depending on their bi-racial children. The authors found that there were no racial socialization variations based on the mother's race, however, practices did vary depending on the biracial heritage of the children (Rollins and Hunter, 2013). This suggests that expectations of the discrimination their children will experience influences how mothers prepare their children (Rollins and Hunter, 2013). Furthermore, biracial children with any Black heritage are more likely to receive self-development racial socialization to prepare them for discrimination and how navigate the dominant white society (Rollins and Hunter, 2013). In contrast, parents with biracial youth who were white and Asian, Indigenous or Latino were more likely to be silent about issues of race (Rollins and Hunter, 2013).



As previously mentioned, majority of studies looking at parent racial socialization practices focus on the American context, however, a study done by Chakawa and Hoglund (2016) examined the differing ways that Canadian parents from different ethnic and racial backgrounds try to teach their children about race. Within the Canadian context, Arab, South Asian, Southeast Asian and East Asian parents were more likely to engage in cultural socialization practices compared to white and western European parents (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous and Latin American parents were found to endorse the same amount of cultural socialization practices as whites and western Europeans (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). Chakawa and Hoglund (2016) also focus on immigrant groups and found that cultural socialization practices were higher among immigrant parents and parents whose children first learned a language other than English. The purpose of cultural socialization in these immigrant families seems to be on maintaining their culture and navigating the Canadian landscape (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016). However, while Chakawa and Hoglund's (2016) study explains the general ways in which certain racial and ethnic groups engage in racial socialization it does not provide insight into the specific race talk that Canadian families use and how that contributes to or challenges the racial hierarchy and inequality in Canada.

### **Placing the Current Research in the Literature**

Several scholars have looked at the way race talk contributes to racial inequality (Myers, 2005; Pollock, 2004), how colorblindness presents itself in children and youth (Hagerman, 2018; Risman and Banerjee, 2013), and the role families play in the racial socialization process of their children (Chakawa and Hoglund, 2016; Hagerman, 2017). However, majority of studies looking at the way in which parents are involved in the racial socialization process with their children focus on the American context and does not really consider how the Canadian context may alter or

influence these practices. Even less research compares racial socialization practices between racialized and white families in Canada. As a result, scholars do not have a substantial amount of information regarding what racial socialization looks like in Canada, and how it relates to the large institutional and structural inequalities that exist. Therefore, further Canadian studies are required to understand the state of racial and ethnic relations in Canada, the ways in which Canadian families engage in race talk, and how the race talk within these families works to uphold the system of racism in Canada. The specific research questions guiding this study are: *What do white and racialized parents report teaching their children about race in Canada? What kind of messages are being passed down to children in both groups regarding race and racism in Canada? And how does this family race talk contribute to the racial consciousness of Canadian children?*

While this chapter has gone over some of the relevant literature around racial socialization studies, each of the following chapters also includes its own literature and research to supplement the discussions. Each chapter in this thesis goes over a central theme or concept that came out of the parent and children interviews, including the race talk and racial socialization practices that parents utilized and how these teachings may have contributed to or influenced the children's racial consciousness. The first chapter articulates the ways in which certain social locations such as occupation type and race influence how family members understand issues of race and racism. Furthermore, how these social locations and identities may contribute to colorblind understanding of race in Canadian children. The second chapter expands on this to explain the differing ways in which white and racialized families understood important issues such as institutional racism. In addition, this chapter also argues the impact of "feeling race" in understanding and teaching race and racism to children. The last chapter discusses a key way in which parents assume children are learning about race and ethnicity in a diverse society like Canada. Both white and racialized parents

mentioned contact with diversity as beneficial for their children, and some parents encouraged travel to further their children's understanding.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Utilizing Winkler's definition of *comprehensive racial learning*, this study ensured that both the voices of parents and their children were represented. To best understand both how parents are teaching their children about race and how children comprehend the concept of race and racism, I used a qualitative approach to conduct my study. Specifically, semi-structured interviews with both parents and children were used to explore racial socialization in the Canadian context. I utilized a qualitative approach to ensure that the participants were able to discuss in-depth how they understood and taught these complex issues. I used an interview guide with open-ended questions which allowed for some elaboration and exploration into differing areas that were central to each specific families focus and attention when it came to discussions of race. Considering Winkler's definition of comprehensive racial learning the research questions that this research addressed were: 1) *What do white and racialized parents report teaching their children about race in Canada?* 2) *What kind of messages are being passed down to children in both groups regarding race and racism in Canada?* 3) *How does this family race talk contribute to the racial consciousness of Canadian children?*

### **Recruitment and Participants**

Families were recruited to participate using convenient snowball sampling. Initial participants were recruited using a poster that was posted on social media, billboards, and circled around by individuals in the community. In the initial recruitment stages, the study was described as "research on how parents talk to their children about social issues such as inequality". Describing the project this way was intentionally done to engage more parents to participate rather than be fearful or hesitant as race relations may in many cases be a controversial topic (Hagerman, 2018; Underhill, 2018).

Families in this study were recruited from the Calgary and Edmonton area in Alberta. Alberta was specifically chosen as an area of focus in the Canadian context as they have one of the largest influx of immigrants in the country (fourth largest after Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia) (Statistics Canada, 2017). In addition, Alberta has a long history of racial discrimination and violence against Indigenous communities (including residential schools and the coercive sterilization of Indigenous women) that has left lasting impressions on race relations in the province (Stote, 2012). In combination, these two factors provided an interesting as well as significant area in which to understand race talk and the ways in which it may contribute to ongoing discrimination and inequality for racialized minorities. Furthermore, these urban settings are focused on as they are more diverse than rural areas and therefore, include individuals that may be more racially conscious or aware.

The inclusion criteria for families that would be interviewed included middle-class families with children between the ages of eight and twelve, and must have lived in Canada for a significant amount of time. The focus was on middle-class families, as literature demonstrates that families of different social classes will have different sets of economic resources and cultural repertoires for managing their children's experiences with societal institutions (Lareau, 2011). Lareau (2011) demonstrates how both white and Black middle-class families engaged in *concerted cultivation*, meaning that they have the resources and abilities to play an active role in fostering, assessing, and sustaining children's development including talents, skills, opinions, cognitive and social skills (Lareau, 2011). Therefore, this study attempts to discover whether these increased resources and activities contribute to whether middle-class families engage in more deliberate and focused racial socialization. Middle-class families were characterized as those who (1) owned a home (2) held a professional career and (3) held a degree/certificate/diploma/etc. When comparing middle-class in

Canada to the United States the salaries are relatively comparable. The median income for Canadian families in 2019 was \$62,900 (Statistics Canada, 2021). In comparison the median income for American families in 2019 was \$68, 703 (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2021). However, when looking at individuals who have a bachelor's degree and comparing their salaries, Canadian individuals make a higher income. A study done by Northeastern University found that based on salary data obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics the median earning of an individual with a bachelor's degree was \$64, 896 (Stobierski, 2020). Canadian individuals with similar education are reported to make slightly more in average income with women sitting at \$68, 342 and men making more than that (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Secondly, the children of these families must have been between the ages of eight and twelve during the time of the interviews. This age range was specifically chosen as scholarly research reveals that this is a crucial developmental stage and parents may be more motivated to teach their children about race and racism as they begin to spend more time outside of the home (Hagerman, 2018). Lastly, these Canadian families must have lived in Canada for a significant amount of time in order to have adequate knowledge of the racial/ethnic relations, and inequalities that exist in the country. Some scholars argue that immigrants become well-adjusted economically and educationally in Canada after roughly eleven years (Lightman and Gingrich, 2013). However, this study included families that have lived in Canada for at least two years as the focus was on their understanding of racism in the country and not how well adjusted they had become economically and educationally. In addition, while this study utilized this frame it did not restrict itself to immigrant families only. Rather, families were recruited based on self-identification into the racial categories with a wide range of races and ethnicities represented.

Twenty-three interviews were completed with parents and fourteen interviews with children. Eighteen families in total were interviewed with eight being white, four being racialized, and six being mixed-race families. Of the fourteen interviews done with children, seven were done with racialized children and seven with white children. Exactly half of the families (9) interviewed were first-generation immigrants to Canada from another country. Further details regarding demographic information on the families is provided in the table below (also see in Appendix A).

Table 1: Demographic Information

<b>White Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender-Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender)</b>
	Bob (F- White)	Stay at home mother	No	Bubble tea (11 –F) Banana (8 – F)
	Constance (F - White)	Professor	No	
	Tee (F – Russian/German)	Nurse	Yes	Girl A (9 – F) Girl M (8 – F)
	Sam (M - American) Sarah (F - American)	Professor and stay at home mother	Yes	
	Gus (F - White)	Professor	No	Bob (12 – M)
	Anne (F- White)	Professor	No	
	Charlotte (F- White/Dutch)	Stay at home mom and spouse is a carpenter/farmer	No	Ezra (11 – F) Naegi (11 – F)
<b>Racialized Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender-Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender)</b>
	Singh (F - Fijian) Singh (M - Fijian)	Engineer and Administrative Clerk	Yes	
	Mad Fish (M - Filipino) Pretty Fish (F - Filipino)	Engineer and Health Care Aide	Yes	Sister Fish (11 – F) Baby Fish (8 – M)
	Nancy (F - Mexican)	Teacher	Yes	Peyton (12 – F)
	Blen (F – Ethiopian/Black)	Project Coordinator	Yes	

<b>Mixed-Race Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender – Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender - Race)</b>
	Kristine (F-White)	Social Worker	No	
	Tristen (M-White) Anne (F-Chinese-Canadian)	University Librarian and stay at home mother	No	Yak (9 – F – Racialized)
	Marissa (F-Middle Eastern) David (M-Indian)	Contractor and stay at home mother	Yes	Taylor (8 – M – Racialized)
	Violent (F-White)	Retired Police Officer	No	Amanda (10 – F - Racialized)
	Roberta (F-Iranian)	Professor	Yes	
	Joyce (F-Filipino)	Administrative Clerk	Yes	Batman (8 – M – Racialized)
	Manu (M-Canadian/Indian)	Student	No	

\*Parent's race is based on their own self-identification during the interviews.

## **Parent Interviews**

As mentioned previously, in order to understand the ways in which Canadian parents are teaching their children about race semi-structured interviews were done with participating families. Prior to the start of the interviews parents were asked to sign a consent form outlining the purpose of the research, details on the interviews, and how their participation and interviews would remain confidential. For families that consented to having their children interviewed as well, parent and child interviews were done separately. In cases where parents did not want their children to be interviewed, only the parents were interviewed. Interviews with the children were done separately from the parent interviews, except in the cases where children requested to have a parent present (this will be expanded on in the coming section). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic interviews were conducted online over a video-conferencing platform (Zoom). Each of the interviews lasted around



an hour and were recorded to allow for transcribing later on. Each of the families consented to having both their audio and video recorded for transcribing purposes. Video recordings specifically were taken in order for the researcher to be able to go back and conduct in-depth memo writing and observation of participant's body language. Furthermore, each of the interviews were conducted in English as stated in the recruitment poster.

The initial methodological design included conducting observations with the participating families after interviews were completed. However, due to COVID-19 increasing restrictions in the province this research design had to pivot to be in line with the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and physical-distancing measures. As a result, I was pushed to only conduct interviews with the participating families and conduct the interviews online over Zoom. Would I have been able to conduct observations alongside the interviews then I believe I would have been able to more intentionally use Winker's definition of comprehensive racial learning to describe and explain the ways in which there Canadian children are learning about issues of race in Canada. Regardless, the interviews helped to gain an insight into both the contexts that Canadian families are emerged in and the kind of content that children are learning regarding race.

An interview guide was used for the interviews and included both demographic questions and questions regarding their racial socialization practices. Questions focusing on racial socialization included the type, frequency, depth and content of their discussions regarding race and racism in Canada (see parent interview guide in appendix B). Parents were asked about issues such as Canada's multiculturalism policy, racial inequality in the country, and ways in which they teach their children about these issues. Furthermore, parents were also asked about how they believe their children may learn about race in contexts outside of the home such as their extracurricular activities and schools. While the parent interviews were conducted more like

tradition interviews in which the interviewer would ask a question and the participants would offer their experiences and insights, the children interviews differed in several ways.

### **Children Interviews**

The parent interviews focused primarily on the specific ways and contexts that they believe their children learn about race. In comparison, the children's interviews focused on the ways in which they specifically understood issues such as race, racism, and inequality. Prior to the start of the children's interviews, the researcher asked the children's parents for consent but also asked the children themselves for assent. This was done to ensure that there was no undo pressure on the children to participate in the interviews. When asking the children for assent parents were asked to leave the room so that their presence would not influence the children's decision on participating. In cases where children did not want to be interviewed parents noted reasons such as their children being shy or nervous about being interviewed by someone they did not know personally. Accommodations were made for children that were nervous or uncomfortable with aspects of the interview. For instance, one of the children did not want to be on camera and therefore, they did not appear on video and only their voice was recorded and included as part of the data.

The children's interviews were also altered to ensure that they were free of any jargon or difficult to understand vocabulary, therefore, making it more age appropriate and relatable to them. To ensure that children stayed engaged and enjoyed the interviewing process, visual research methods were used for the children's interviews. Visual research methods refers to methods such as telling stories, drawing pictures, creating videos, acting, and more (Thomson, 2008). These methods in addition to being enjoyable also communicate in ways that words do not, and let children express themselves and their perspectives in ways that they normally would not be able

to. These methods are also beneficial when interviewing children on sensitive topics as when asking kids directly about topics like race they may try and find the most socially acceptable answer, but when asking them to draw certain prompts or act something out they may not do this as much. Visual research methods are loaded with social constructions and are culturally-specific, so if chosen carefully they can tell researchers a lot about issues such as race (Thomson, 2008).

Scholars have conducted visual research methods in a variety of ways, however, the prompts and exercises used for this study were pulled from studies done by Risman and Banerjee (2013), and Hagerman (2010; 2017). Some of these techniques included activities such as vignette's, drawings and discussing race as seen in popular culture (see appendix C for full children's interview guide). Hagerman (2010) notes that strategies like these really ensure that you are doing research with children rather than on children, this means including them as active co-producers of data.

Conducting virtual interviews with children came with its own set of methodological challenges, the most prominent one in this study was in regards to building rapport with the children. In comparison to in person interviews, or more ethnographic based research that may happen in children's homes or other familiar spaces, I was not able to analyze and freely inquire about the children's context. For instance, had I interviewed the children in person in their own homes I would have been able to ask them about their favourite toys or books that they own, or been given a tour of their room. All of these experiences would add to contextualizing the environment and space that children are growing up in and learning about various topics, like race. While this was doable to a certain extent over online video conferencing, the interviewer is not able to take note of as much and the experience does not flow as naturally as it could have if done in person. As a result, a lot of the interactions and discussions that happen before interviews that

help with the building of rapport were not there in the virtual interviews. With in-person interviews, the interviewer may become more familiar to the children when they see them interacting with their parents. However, since parent interviews were also done virtually, children commonly did not see the researcher till their own interviews. This inevitably impacted the ability for the researcher to build a good rapport with children, and consequently perhaps how open children may have been with some of their responses.

Several children did not want to participate in the interviews, with their parents noting that they were too nervous to talk to a stranger online or were too shy. In order to take account of this as well as provide children with another option in the case that they did want to participate in the research, I created a workbook that was disseminated out to the families. The workbook include writing prompts, questions, and drawings regarding similar topics that would have been in their interviews. However, while these booklets were sent to all the families whose children did not want to be interviewed, none of the children completed and returned the workbooks.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the family interviews was analyzed using both a constant comparative method and from an intersectional approach. Using an intersectional approach takes into consideration the families race, ethnicity, class, and gender, and how these social positions intersect to place families in positions of advantage or disadvantage (Crenshaw,1991). In addition, the researcher analyzed the data to see how it may relate or contribute to the “new racism”, that is, whether colour-blind ideology was present in Canadian families as they engage in racial socialization. In addition to using an intersectional approach, I also used a constant comparative method while collecting and analyzing the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). A constant comparative approach is important in developing complex theory that corresponds closely

to the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). This method ensures that the researcher is constantly interacting and involved with their data and analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). This includes comparing data from the beginning of the research, comparing data with emerging categories and demonstrating the relations between concepts and categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Furthermore, the constant comparative method means that researcher is going back and forth between the data and literature repetitively both during collection of data and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). While conducting interviews with the families, each interview informed further questions that were included in the interview guide, concepts and area to explore during interviews, and categories used in coding already collected data.

Both the parent and children interviews were coded and analyzed using NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software program). Prior to coding an overview reading was done on the data collected to stimulate reflection and ideas of possible emerging themes (Angrosino, 2007). Throughout the analysis of the interviews, the data was coded in the two step process identified in Charmaz (2014), as well as Angrosino (2007). The interviews were initially coded for actions, which is the main purpose and intention of the material (Charmaz, 2014). Action coding was completed on a sentence by sentence basis as the focus of the analysis is on the content rather than the specific words or terminology used. The second step, thematic coding, looked for patterns and trends that occurred within the transcriptions of the interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Angrosino, 2007). The thematic codes looked for reoccurring patterns in types of racial socialization practices and the content being taught to children, however, these patterns were also analyzed through an intersectional lens. The main themes that came out of the study were based on ones already identified in the relevant literature, but also included new emerging ones that were not already discussed and noted in previous scholarly work (Angrosino, 2007).

## **Ethical Considerations**

In order to get ethics approval there were two main concerns that needed to be considered. The first being the safety and comfort of the children that were being interviewed. Since the children in this study are too young to provide consent, consent was asked of the parents and then the children were asked for assent to ensure that they were not pressured into doing the interview. Other measures that were taken to mitigate any undue pressure on the children included asking the parents to leave the room when asking for assent, checking in with the children during the interview, and accommodating the children's wishes in order to be completely comfortable for the interview. Parents had the potential to be present during the interviews however, this was based on the child's decision. After assent was asked of the child the researcher asked if the children would like to have their parents there during the interview in order to feel comfortable. Previous research (Hagerman, 2010) shows that this is a strategy used to ensure that shy children participating in research feel safe and secure during the interview process. If the child did not express that they wanted their parents to be present during the interview then the interviews were conducted with only the child present. The study was altered to ensure that there was no potential risk or harm that may come up for the children.

The second concern was in regards to the language that the interviews would be conducted in. Specifically, that there would not be a language barrier between the participants and interviewers. The only area in which participants would potentially require additional support or accommodations in consenting to the interviews would be if there was a language barrier. However, given that the participants in the study would have a college degree or higher and a professional or highly-skilled jobs, it was assumed that they would be proficient in English given that the requirement for professional jobs in Canada is proficiency in English or French. In

addition, since the researcher speaks only English, one requirement for participation in the study was that participants had to have at least grade 10, English proficiency. Recruitment for this study was contingent on participant's written and verbal comprehension of English. As stated in the recruitment flyer, interviews were to be conducted in English as the researcher has a language constraint to English only.

### **Researcher Positionality**

It is significant to note that my own social position as a white, mid-20 year old woman shaped the data production, as well as the interpretation of that data. Being a white woman, I had more access to white, privileged family spaces which allowed me to easily recruit white families for the study. In addition, my own whiteness may have impacted the type and amount of information that these white families were willing to offer and present. On the flipside, my positionality also impacted my access to racialized families, and what they felt comfortable disclosing to me in regards to issues of race and racism. Being aware of this, prior to the interviews I explained to both racialized and white families the purpose and intention behind why this research was being conducted and also explained my position in this research. Furthermore, as the researcher conducting the interviews I made sure not to be offended by any comments or arguments that may come up but rather expecting certain themes in regards to whiteness and white supremacy would be discussed.

My positionality in this research impacted not only my recruitment of families but also how I interpreted the data. There were several significant findings and themes that came out the family interviews both for parents and children, and understanding the widespread impact and influence of white supremacy both in these families' lives and my own, I made sure to analyze and interrogate the ways in which whiteness appears and contributes to differing practices of racial

socialization in the families. I think it is significant to note that being a young, white female in this research study, I too was learning and reflecting on these same issues that I was discussing with both white and racialized families. While I was analyzing the data for main themes and concepts in the data, I was also learning about and interrogating my own whiteness and race talk. The main themes that will be discussed in this thesis include multiculturalism and intersectionality, institutional racism, and intergroup contact theory.



## CHAPTER 4: UNDER THE COVER OF MULTICULTURALISM

Some scholars argue that the social relations that individuals are embedded in influence the ways in which they navigate and comprehend issues such as race and racism (Burke, 2016). The way we understand racial dynamics is shaped by the beliefs, images and feelings that people hold. It is the beliefs, images and feelings that Joe Feagin (2010) calls racial frames. Racial frames include ideologies, prejudices, and stereotypes that contribute to how individuals perceive issues of race. Practices and conversations that parents engage in with their children may provide early exposure to these racial frames (Zucker and Patterson, 2018; Brown and Lesane Brown, 2006). However, these racial frames are not set in stone, rather individuals can choose whether to accept or reject them. Societies' dominant racial frame is the white racial frame, and its purpose is to justify racial stratification and naturalize racial inequality. Even perceptual frames such as the "white racial frame", while hegemonic, are used differently by different people (Feagin, 2013). The *white racial frame* refers to an overarching white worldview which helps people make sense of everyday situations, and is characterized by a positive orientation towards whites and a negative one towards racial "others" (Feagin, 2013). As Feagin (2013) notes, people use what they need from the frame to deal with situations, however, not everyone may use parts of it in the same way. The determining factor here is what social characteristics and ideological contexts contribute to certain understandings of race and racial consciousness. Lewis (2004) argues that the importance of studying both the symbolic and material dimensions of race is that while they are intertwined, scholars should ask how these two interact and how they are reproduced and challenged in the everyday. This is relevant to family racial socialization in that the ideologies and material contexts of these families may influence the use of certain practices and discussions to challenge existing white structures or abide by them. Specifically, in the Canadian context this may include

considering the way in which ideologies and policies such as the multiculturalism policy impact the racial consciousness of Canadian families. This chapter will demonstrate how the lack of racial justice discourses and discussions of institutional racism translate into colour-blind ideologies exemplified in certain families. Furthermore, a lack of acknowledgement of true intersectionality can also distort and limit the ways in which some families understand race and racism in Canada. One of the major influencing factors included Canada's official Multiculturalism policy. While the U.S. and Canada are both ethnically and racially diverse, only Canada has an official multiculturalism policy.

A huge contributor to Canada's national identity and general Canadian ideology includes its multiculturalism policy. This policy states that Canada promotes and recognizes cultural and racial diversity, as well as the freedom of all its members to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage (Canada Justice Laws, 1988). The inclusion of the multiculturalism policy in Canadian law has been shown to influence the ways in which some Canadians understand or view race in the country (Ali, 2008; Stein, 2018). The policy also contributes to Canada's domestic and international identity as a country praised for its exceptionalism and benevolence, with no imperial history (Stein, 2018). Statistics Canada identified that most Canadians were actually proud of Canada's historical achievements including things like the Canadian constitution (Statistics Canada, 2013). Scholars point out that while Canada does not have one single image, the common narrative surrounding Canada is a uniform image of a "multicultural, liberal democracy at home, and a benevolent, peacekeeping 'middle power' abroad" (Stein, 2018, p. 464). This veneer of friendliness and politeness may lead some individuals to believe that Canada is above racism, and more specifically that the colour of a person's skin or the culture they practice do not matter. Stein (2018) explains that these constructions of "Canadian exceptionalism" erase the country's racial

and colonial history and violence, as well as ongoing injustices and inequalities. The idea that there is no racism in Canada may lead to an absence of conversations regarding the racial inequalities, wrongdoings, and ongoing discrimination that exist. As a result, this may perpetuate and strengthen notions of colour-blindness in Canada.

However, research shows that in this egalitarian, democratic society not all people from different socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds are treated equally and have access to the same opportunities. (Godley, 2018; Lund, 2006; Beagan and Etowa, 2009). This was also an understanding shared by all parents that were interviewed, regardless of their race. While all parents generally noted that they are aware that racism exists in Canada, the degree and depth of their critiques and consciousness varied along certain social lines. More specifically, this chapter discusses the ways in which both occupation type (non-academic careers) and whiteness contributed to a less critical understanding of racism in Canada.

### **Non-academic Immigrant Families and the Myth of Multiculturalism**

The families that participated in the interviews all had a vast range of careers, however, generally the immigrant families could be divided in those that worked in academia or community advocate roles and those that had non-academic careers. This section will focus on the immigrant families who worked outside of academia and community advocate organizations, and how those social positions influence their racial comprehension. While all the immigrant families noted being aware that racism existed, they also stated that they personally have never experienced racism in Canada. Accompanied with that, they explained how welcomed they felt coming to the country and that they had a sense of belonging. One white immigrant mother, T, noted that she had lived in several countries and Canada was the first one in which she really felt a sense of belonging. This was also mirrored by a racialized immigrant mother named Joyce who mentioned that she had

travelled to several other countries and believed Canada to be the most polite and welcoming.

When asking Joyce if she believed inequality existed in Canada she stated that:

**“To be honest, in some sorts, but I haven't experienced it really. It's just recently that I hear in the news, especially in Vancouver, BC, like they kind of you know, they're racist towards Asians because of the Corona virus, but pre-covid I never experienced it really, not even a bit about being discriminated or whatever.” –Joyce**

Joyce explains her awareness of inequality in Canada but adds that before the global pandemic she had not experienced differential treatment “even a bit”. Furthermore, her example of racism in Canada is a current and relevant one, meaning that she is informed and aware of issues that racialized individuals face in Canada. However, even with her current example she does not connect the ways in which that discrimination may impact her and her family. Similar explanations were made by another racialized, immigrant parent. When asking Mad Fish, a racialized father, if he or his family had experienced racialization in Canada he replies no and then explains:

**“Again, I guess they might have or even I might have but it's more... to me it's more on perspective right? Like when things happen I always, so when things happen... I think about colour last than always because I'm brown that I'm being this... I guess I just haven't experienced it or I just haven't perceived it as that when I experience it.” – Mad Fish**

Like Joyce, Mad Fish also explains that he and his family have never experienced racism in Canada. However, unlike Joyce he also interestingly points out that while he does not think they have experienced it, they may just not have perceived it as racism. This last part is intriguing and key to analyzing the ways in which the immigrant families in this study understand racism in Canada. Tied to this conversation are ideas of inclusion, multiculturalism, and the conflation of race and culture.

A previous study done by Ali (2008) found that individuals' social contexts are significant to the reinforcement of the ideology of multiculturalism and an equitable society. Ali (2008) finds that second-generation youth believed in the myth of multiculturalism because of the diversity in

which they were exposed to in their daily lives. This diversity included different races, religions, languages and ethnicities, all of which represented the idea of an equitable, multicultural Canada to them (Ali, 2008). Ali (2008) points out that to these youth the proliferation of “ethnic symbols” was proof of an equitable society. Interestingly, the youth, like the parents in this study, claimed to not have experienced racism. One explanation for this may be that both the youth, and families in this study, commonly interact with individuals who are similar to them in regards to ethnicity and culture. For instance, Joyce, a racialized mother, points out that her mixed-race children (Filipino and Ukrainian) attended a Ukrainian school but also have a lot of Filipino friends. Similarly, Mad Fish explains that his daughter has many Filipino friends at school, and their family friends are also mainly Filipino. These families exist in ethnic enclaves in Canadian society and commonly interact and live in material and ideology contexts that are similar to theirs. However, that is not to say that they do not interact with other cultures and races, specifically with white people and white institutions. The immigrant families interviewed for this study commonly pointed out and discussed the diversity that their kids were living in, including their schools, extracurricular activities and neighborhoods. However, as they were discussing this diversity none of them seemed to comment on the dominant white groups either in their own lives or their children’s. Similarly, Ali (2008) finds that the youth in their study did not identify a clear dominant group in their social settings who had greater access to power and privilege than others. By focusing on the myth of multiculturalism in Canada they also undermine the racial hierarchy that exists. The diversity that they notice in their families’ life reinforces formal understandings of multiculturalism, such as the multiculturalism policy. This reinforcement makes them more susceptible to missing manifestations of whiteness and the privileges that are afforded to some over others, and where they may fall in the racial hierarchy that exists in Canada.

The children of these parents were also interviewed to understand the ways in which they understand race and multiculturalism in Canada. When inquiring about whether her children ever asked about race Joyce explains that:

**“...surprisingly not just because maybe in how we brought them up. Like when they're here we just tell them to be kind to everyone and that we don't really pay attention to what colour you are.” - Joyce**

Throughout the interview Joyce praises Canada's multiculturalism policy and frequently notes that she tries to teach her children that they need to be kind and respectful to everyone, regardless of their race or culture. In a following interview with Joyce's eight year old son, Batman, he explains his understanding of race. When asked about things like inequality and whether he believed all races had equal opportunities in society he replied with:

**“I think it doesn't matter, like the colour of a person's skin it doesn't really matter because um, cause everybody is unique and um, if everyone's okay if somebody has a certain colour of skin, everyone's okay cause like we all have different skin colour.” - Batman**

In addition, later in the interview when asking if Batman thought all groups of people were treated the same he notes that:

**“Well, all the people that, they should be treated the same as others but maybe some people, like some people they want to be treated the same but they just can't do it because sometimes you have to treat someone that you want to be treated, so you can be treated that way as well. So you and that person, you're just totally equal by how you want to be treated.” - Batman**

Batman exemplifies a colour-blind understanding of race and racism in Canada. Quotes such as these demonstrate the ways in which race talk between parents and their children may contribute to aspects of colourblindness in their children's racial consciousness. Batman not only generally notes how race does not matter in Canadian society but also provides evidence for one of the frames of colourblindness outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2018). In Batman's last quote he argues that everyone has a choice in the way that they are treated, claiming that if one wants to be treated

nicely and fairly then they should treat others the same way. However, claims like this ignore the ways in which whiteness and white supremacy are instilled in societal structures and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). As a result, marginalized and racialized individuals interact differently with white institutions, usually in ways that do not work in their favor or benefit. This type of argument falls under the frame of abstract liberalism of the colorblind framework in that it assumes that everyone has individual choice in the chances and opportunities in their life, not acknowledging how race determines the life opportunities that are available to someone (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Similarly, another non-academic immigrant family shows a similar practice in which the white immigrant mother replies to a question about whether she has discussed discrimination or racism with her children. She notes that:

**“I never spoke with them about, you know you grow up with that, there's not much worth to say you know, their class is multicultural, lots of ethnic groups, from India, Black people, white people... my daughter she has a best friend, she is black. They kind of growing up with that and nobody is making any difference between them or you know, here he is superior, or you know, inferior, you know it is all equal I would say, yeah.” - T**

Not only does T mention that her kids are growing up in a lot of racial diversity, she also uses that as an explanation as to why she personally has not discussed issues of race with her two white daughters. During an interview with T's two white daughters, Girl A and Girl M (aged 9 and 8 respectively), the girls were asked to draw two houses, a “rich” person house and a “poor” person house. When asked whether white and Black people had the same chances of living in the “rich person” house, they both replied with yes. Both girls claimed that to them race did not matter when it came to life chances and opportunities. However, there were other social inequalities that would impact an individual's life chances. During a segment of the same interview the girls discussed poverty and homelessness:

**Mel: So do you think that everybody is treated the same or equally?**

**Girl A: No.**

**Mel: No? Why not? Why might people be treated differently?**

**Girl A: Um well maybe it's because some people can't find any work! Or there's like not much work around them so they can't get any money.**

**Girl M: I think they should be equally the same, they should all be with houses and clothes!**

**Mel: Do you think that maybe the way someone looks, like their skin colour, impacts whether they can get a job or not?**

**Girl A: No, not really!**

**Girl M: No.**

Both girls point out that they are aware that individuals may be treated differently in society, however, this difference would not be due to their race. When asked whether they believed race mattered, both Girl A and M, and Batman explained that race does not matter, and no one should be judged according to their race. All of these children demonstrate colourblindness in their comprehension of race. This may be explained by the fact that these children are going to school and attending extracurricular activities in which they engage with both children and adults that are different from them both racially and ethnically. These “ethnic symbols” or “symbols of diversity” act as a reinforcement that everyone is equal in their world. While Ali’s (2008) study provides some significant insight and explanation as to why these parents may argue that they have not experienced racism, and are less critical of multiculturalism than other parents in the study, this research expands off of that.

Scholars have argued for a strong rhetoric of colourblindness to explain the current type of racism. Compared to the Jim Crow era, these scholars claim that in the post-civil rights era racism is a much more covert, institutional type in which individuals deny the existence of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Burke, 2016; Mueller, 2017). However, a key finding of this study is that this conceptualization of racism does not seem to line up with what parents in this study argued regarding racism in Canada. Generally however, all the families acknowledged the existence of



racism in Canada. One racialized immigrant father elaborates on the ways in which he understands inequalities in Canada:

**“So this will be mostly in the policies that they have I guess with, when it comes to the Aboriginals so different laws apply, different Canadian laws and policies apply to them and the rest of Canadians. Again, I wasn't born and raised here so I don't know the whole history of how that came up, how that come to happen, like with policies and laws, how they're drafted and come up but, so they're treated differently based on their origin or what they are right? Instead of just same for everybody else. I guess those laws and policies were not original, there must have been a good reason why those exist but those are the things I do not know. But I do know there is.” - Mad Fish**

Mad Fish previously notes that his family has not experienced racism, or at least not perceived it as racism. However, he still demonstrates an awareness of the ways in which institutional racism exists and may impact some groups in Canada. As seen in the quote he does not elaborate to explain perhaps the ways in which institutional racism may impact him and his family, and the ways in which whiteness connects to this. What is interesting is that throughout most of the interview Mad Fish demonstrates a colour-blind understanding of race, arguing that he tries not to assume that certain behaviors are racially motivated. In addition, he tries to avoid teaching his children about racism and violence to preserve his children's “innocence”. It is not till Mad Fish is deliberately asked about racism and inequality in Canada that he specifically explains institutional racism. A similar process is seen in an interview with his two children, Sister Fish (11 years old) and Baby Fish (8 years old). Throughout the interview Sister Fish explains how race does not matter and everyone should be respected regardless of their culture. It is not till Sister Fish is pushed to consider examples of inequality in society that she elaborates to include discussions on Black Lives Matter. She discusses her awareness about the BLM protests and the media coverage on it:

**Mel: Where did you hear about it?**

**Sister Fish: Like maybe on stuff when I was doing stuff at home and a weekend and I was like scrolling on my phone, on internet and stuff and it just came up.**

**Mel: Oh yeah, did you talk to your parents about it? Like did you have any questions about it?**

**Sister Fish: Um, during the whole George Floyd thing I asked what happened, and my dad explained it sort of.**

**Mel: Yeah, okay great! So in general, do you think that the colour of a person's skin matters?**

**Sister Fish: It honestly shouldn't, but it does because of like history and stuff and how like a long time ago people thought whites were superior and Blacks were inferior and so they used them as slaves.**

Sister Fish notes that she is aware of racism such as police brutality, however, similar to her father she does not explain or discuss it in relation to institutional racism in Canada and how that may impact herself and her family. For kids this may mean not really thinking about race and racism till they are pushed to do so in situations like asking them whether they believe there is a difference in life opportunities between Blacks and whites, or how their life may be different if they were a different race.

Regardless of the myth of multiculturalism, all parents noted that racial inequality does exist in Canada. However, it is critical to understand that due to the timeline of when the interviews were done it is nearly impossible to deny the existence of racism. One could argue that perhaps due to the extensive media coverage and protests common examples of racism that parents gave focused around Black Lives Matter and the Black white binary. For these families, and many other Canadian families, it is nearly impossible to deny the existence of racism. Families all over are constantly engaging with other institutions such as the media in which both parents and their kids are watching injustices happen all over the world. These include issues such as the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many more. Additionally, with the Corona virus there is more and more coverage on Anti-Asian hate. These are all issues that most, if not all families, are in some

way aware of. However, what is significant to this study and analysis is the ways in which these families deal with it in their own personal lives.

When discussing issues such as Black Lives Matter, two of the parents made remarks in which the white racial frame was enacted. For instance, Joyce, a racialized immigrant mother reflects on a time when her and her sons were walking in the neighborhood and they noticed a Black Lives Matter poster in a neighbor's window. To which she remarked:

**“I remember they ask me about it and I’m like it just means that no matter what colour you are all lives matter. Actually, it’s not just black, even brown or white, every like matters right? So that’s what I told them.” - Joyce**

Additionally, when asking a white immigrant mother whether she discussed BLM with her daughters she explained that:

**“...lots of manipulation around this topic. I was very neutral in that. I didn’t even, you know, I didn’t go on that topic very deep or you know. I thought about that talk but you know, because I know there were lots of manipulations like... they kill some white people as well. Nobody you know did anything, nobody put them in the news, you know, they didn’t do a funeral, you know, like big like this was.” - T**

For these non-academic immigrant families the way in which they may be dealing with this is by distancing themselves from issues of racism and racialization. One reason that these immigrant parents may be trying to distance themselves from race is that they may feel like they do not have the resources to promote change. By distancing themselves from racism they may be bringing themselves closer to whiteness. Distancing themselves from issues of racism and racialization includes conversations on the hegemony of whiteness as well as “immigrant hope”. Ideas such as academic success are associated with ethno-racial identity in which whiteness is used as the standard bearer of success and achievement (Jiménez and Horowitz, 2013). More specifically, reviews of several other studies show that whiteness is closely bound up with ideas

of success, while racialized groups such as Latinos and Blacks are associated with the opposite (Jiménez and Horowitz, 2013).

According to the data, some of the biggest issues impacting families' racial consciousness includes understandings of institutional racism, as well as the myth of multiculturalism. As a result, by not discussing and acknowledging the ways in which whiteness impacts their life chances and opportunities outside of their pockets of diversity they continue to reinforce the white racial frame and undermine as well as not recognize institutional racism. As Feagin (2013) explains, a significant aspect of the racial frame is collective memory and forgetting. By hyper focusing on the multiculturalism policy as the main example of equity in Canadian society it forgets the larger and broader institutional racism that impacts marginalized groups such as Indigenous groups, racialized groups and immigrants. The memory of the ideology of multiculturalism reinforces the idea that Canada is a country in which each race and ethnicity is celebrated and given equal opportunities to "make it". For families, especially first-generation immigrant families, that are learning about Canada it is nearly impossible not to come in contact with its multiculturalism policy. The myth of multiculturalism is saturated in almost all aspects of Canadian culture, it is taught to children in grade school, included in advertisements, and ingrained into Canadian law. On the contrary, institutional racism and inequality is not as commonly or widely taught and discussed. As a result, discourses of multiculturalism present in Canada influence the ways in which parents understand racism in Canada, and furthermore the way in which they teach it to their children. By only including discourses of Canada as being "polite" and "benevolent" it frames the racial socialization of children such that they are receiving only messages in alignment with the myth of multiculturalism which suggests racial inequities is not a marker of Canadian society thereby promoting colour-blind ideology among children.

## **Whiteness and Racial Socialization: How White and Racialized Families Differ**

White and racialized families in this study approached racial socialization in different ways. This chapter analyzes some of these differences and compares the approaches between these families. While this chapter includes the practices of both racialized and white families, this section focuses primarily on the lack of critical engagement of white parents in the process of racially socializing their children. A lot of the research looking at racial socialization focuses on racialized families, however, there are several studies that address the ways in which whites learn about race (Hagerman, 2018; Perry, 2001). For instance, Hagerman's (2018) book *White Kids* looks at the ways in which white children in America engage in comprehensive racial learning. Hagerman analyzes the ways in which institutions such as media, school, and experiences like vacationing and volunteering all contribute to white kids' understanding of race and racism. While the previous section looked at the ways in which non-academic immigrant families displayed a less critical understanding of racism due to the myth of multiculturalism, the white families in this study also demonstrated a lack of engagement with significant issues of race in Canada. Several of the white families commented on the discrepancies between what Canada's official multiculturalism policy states and how they believe this policy is actually practiced. Oftentimes white parents used words such as "ornamental" and "veneer" to describe multiculturalism. However, as will be demonstrated, regardless of the fact that these white parents understand institutional racism in Canada in relation to the policy, there were ways in which the strong rhetoric of multiculturalism impacted how they dealt with racism in their own personal lives.

Both white and racialized parents noted that they teach their kids about race and racism in Canada, and that this was an important issue to teach their children. However, these families differed in the way that they deemed discussing race as essential. Previous research looking at

racial socialization notes that racialized parents are more likely to participate in teachings that warn their children about interpersonal racism or institutional barriers that they may come across (Hughes et al, 2006; Hughes and Chen, 1997). Additionally, these studies also demonstrate that in general racialized families are more likely to engage in deliberate racial socialization than white parents (Hughes et al, 2006; Hughes and Chen, 1997). Although, the white families in this study discuss racism and teach their kids about race, I will demonstrate in the coming chapter how they do so much differently than the racialized families.

The racialized parents that were not also first-generation immigrants (who did not work in academia/community advocacy) heavily emphasized that for them teaching their children about racism was essential in Canadian society. As one racialized father, David, states: **“it’s like something that you need for survival almost”**. These racialized parents go on to explain that they know their kids are going to encounter discrimination and it is best that they learn how to address and handle it from their parents. This is a stark comparison to the approach that most white families use in attempting to teach their children about race. Generally, white parents would comment on the significance of teaching their kids about racism and discrimination and explain that this is a part of their children growing up in so much diversity. The white parents also demonstrated the way in which white families have a choice of whether to teach their kids about racism, and when to do so. For instance, one white mother, Constance, points out that her eleven-year old daughter who frequently fights for the under-dog was somewhat of a “social justice warrior”. Constance explains that:

**“I don’t want to say entirely accidentally, but not fully intentionally I think we have raised a little social justice warrior... I don’t want to say it’s accidentally cause almost certainly she’s influenced by her environment but I also, it’s not like that was the plan right? It wasn’t something that we aimed to do...” - Constance**

Quotes like this demonstrate a complete contrast to ones like the one from David who stated that racial socialization was required for survival. The fact of the matter is that in a racialized society like Canada, regardless of the multiculturalism policy and ideas of liberalism, white parents still have the option of teaching their children about racism. Unlike the concerns of racialized parents, Constance's white daughter is unlikely to personally feel the impacts of racism. Interestingly, Constance points out that raising a child who fights against inequalities was not something that they had aimed for. While many of the white parents noted that they think it is important for their children to be aware of the impacts of racism and racial ideologies, there was little conversation on social justice or action. Of the white and mixed-race (in which one parent was white) families that participated, topics such as social justice and allyship were only brought up in a couple of the families. These conversations of social justice and action were more common among racialized families. While colourblindness was generally absent in all the families, white families still generally insinuated that race was an issue for racialized families. That is, that racialized families were the ones who had to focus on social justice and dismantling racism in Canada. One racialized mother even commented on the fact that from her experiences and point of view white families did not feel as though they had to think of race at all. She states:

**“But for the white community, white parents... sometimes I feel jealous, they don't even think about it. I'm like wow! Because that's not their issue right?” - Blen**

Blen points out the fact that even in Canada, a country praised and celebrated for its diversity and tolerance of difference, white parents still believe that race is not something that involves or consumes them. In comparison to racialized families, these white families do not exhibit the same criticalness and urgency when it comes to racial socialization. For racialized parents, like Blen and David, there is not much of a choice when it comes to teaching their

racialized children about discrimination and inequality. As they both explained in their interviews, this will be something that they experience and these lessons are essential for their children. Furthermore, these racialized parents pointed out that if they are not teaching their kids about these issues then their kids are unlikely to get these lessons from other institutions like their school. For white parents, racial socialization is still deemed optional, and in some cases happens “accidentally”. When asked what sparked parents to first discuss racial inequality with their kids most white parents noted that there was not a single significant event, but rather it was just happenstance.

In addition, to white parents optionally teaching their kids about race and racism, another common thread throughout the interviews was the idea of “protection”. Previous studies done on white families note that white families have the option of protecting their kids from racism (Hagerman, 2018; Underhill, 2018). Specifically, Hagerman (2018) finds that when it comes to media, white parents try to protect their children’s “innocence”. As she explains, this demonstrates the structural privilege these families have in order to be able to avoid these conversations (Hagerman, 2018). This is in comparison to racialized families who cannot avoid discussing these issues as they feel it is required for their child’s safety. When asking one white mother about the Black Lives Matter protests that were happening in the Edmonton area she stated:

**“No, no, I don’t involve them in that... no, I was keeping them protected. They’re too early to know about this, and about issues in the world. I let them be children you know.” - T**

T goes on to discuss how she wants her kids to maintain their innocence and be protected from these types of social problems. As mentioned above, T does not acknowledge her structural advantage and privilege of being able to avoid issues such as BLM and other racial injustices. Although Canada is multicultural, her white children still sit in positions of privilege in which their



safety is not determined on whether their parents teach them about racial discrimination or not. Additionally, by protecting her children from examples of racial injustice currently happening it teaches them to acquire a colour-blind ideology. Girl A and Girl M frequently noted that race does not matter and asked **“why would it make a difference if someone had different skin colour?”**. When asking other parents if there was anything they thought they had to protect their children from, another white mother noted that she did not want her children exposed to the violence involved in racism. This unfortunately is not an option for racialized families as violence is exactly what they are trying to teach their children about.

For the white families, race did not seem to be as much of a priority. While arguing race is important they also frequently weighed it against other social inequalities. To elaborate, white parents would commonly explain that they thought teaching their kids about racism was required, but that there were other issues like gender and sexuality that they may spend more time on. Several of the white parents argued that they tended to focus more on gender and sexuality as that was more prominent and emergent in their children’s lives. When talking to one white mother, Anne, about preparing to have children and the type of discussions she thought she would be having with her child she stated that:

**“I mean yeah, I think I understood that I would be having all of the difficult conversations with my child. I think again probably because we were white, I was really focused, and I knew I was having a girl, I was really focused on pushing against some gender norms we have now... I was very aware of the literature and how some people start treating girls differently from boys from the moment they are born.” - Anne**

Anne clearly mentions that because of her race she was able to focus more on issues of gender with her child. She notes that before her daughter was even born she looked into various books and resources to address issues such as gender norms, stereotypes and gender socialization. However, this same effort and practice was not put into teaching her daughter about racism and

whiteness in Canadian society. This not only exemplifies the way in which white families get to choose when it comes to racial socialization but also their ability to focus on other social inequalities instead. What is interesting is that during Anne's interview she frequently discusses institutional racism yet still argues that race is not as significant of an issue compared to gender and sexuality for her child. This same trend follows through several other white families in which they would discuss issues like institutional racism and whiteness, but still explain that there were other problems that were more relevant to their children's social development. One white couple explained:

**Sarah: I'd say I have kept more of an emphasis on gendered things. Getting more exposure to popular cultures' gender stereotypes. Um, yeah and that's what I feel they face more especially with their friends, dealing with gender kinds of things like how girls are supposed to be and how boys are supposed to be. That to me is more emergent in their day to day life than racial...**

**Sam: They interact with those, yeah, I agree with that.**

Similar to Anne, Sarah and Sam explain that rather than race, gender is more prevalent in their children's lives. In addition, they add that this is the issue that their kids also commonly come across with their friends. Regardless of the racial diversity in their kids' lives and the strong rhetoric of multiculturalism, Sarah still argues that gender is a more prominent issue than race. One explanation for this may be that her kids are not engaging with race the same way racialized children do and as a result it does not force or necessitate conversations on racism. White parents are able to maneuver around race and use it as something to teach to their kids at some point, or as a check on the list of inequalities in society.

However, for racialized families race is an issue that is constantly there and is unavoidable. Hence, racialized families, like the ones interviewed for this study, initiate these conversations as soon as possible and with top priority. What is intriguing is that this practice is not lost on white

parents, some of the white parents acknowledge that due to their race these discussions are not treated with the same criticality. When asking one white mother how important she believed it to be to teach her white daughter about race she commented:

**“I don't know how to rank it against other things. I think it's really important right, we live where we live because I don't drive a car and I need to live close enough to the university that I can get there by transit in a reasonable amount of time... would it have been worth it for me to move to a more racially diverse neighborhood, but if it meant I had to spend two hours on transit to get to work, I don't know. But I do think it's, I feel like I'm going to say it's very important but how meaningful is that for me to say I think it's important, I don't know how that plays out in my actions.” - Constance**

Constance explains that to move to a more racially diverse neighborhood to teach her daughter about race may not rank as high as other life issues that impact their family. Burke (2016) points out that significant to any understanding of racism or racialization is the material and ideological context which impacts the ways in which people experience and understand race in society. These parents demonstrate this exactly as for these white families race is not something that impacts them in a way that limits or disadvantages them but rather gives them privileges. Regardless of Canada's multiculturalism policy, Canada still holds a dominant group that is awarded privileges and opportunities that are not given to marginalized groups (Winter, 2014; Porter, 1965; Tepperman, Curtis and Kwan, 2007). Specifically, studies show that charter groups are located at the top of the social and economic hierarchy while minority groups are at the bottom (Porter, 1965; Tepperman et al., 2007). Constance exemplifies the idea of believing in racial equality but weighing it against the benefits that one's race affords them. This concept is coined by Hagerman in her book *White Kids*. Hagerman explains that the term “conundrum of privilege” refers to how white parents may work towards cultivating “anti-racist praxis” in their children but also still receive unearned white advantages and benefits (2018, p.55). As she notes, families may work hard to bring their children up with concepts of social justice, however, they are still raising

children in a society that is structured by racial and gender inequalities, ones that are difficult for them to change (Hagerman, 2018).

Although white families did not focus on race the same way as racialized parents, they did still attempt to teach their children about racism in Canada. Additionally, they also worked to teach their kids about other inequalities including gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. However, something that significantly lacked in these conversations is intersectionality. Of all the parents, only one white mother mentioned intersectionality when it came to teaching her daughter about race. White parents focused on race and the impact on racialized individuals, as well as gender inequality but did not discuss the ways in which these different inequalities intersect to make some groups more vulnerable and susceptible to discrimination than others. For instance, the parents and their children did not talk about the different experiences between Black women and white men. One white mother explained how she was trying to teach her kids about homelessness and mental illness, but did not go further to explain how race may tie into that as well. The lack of these intersectional conversations does several things to hinder their children's understanding and comprehension of race in Canada. One issue with this is that it eliminates some of the complexity in racism, especially in a multicultural society. By addressing gender and sexuality over race or without race these white parents take on a narrative of victimhood for their own children. By explaining to their kids how gender stereotypes and norms impact them over issues of race these children learn how to identify and address those issues over ones of race. As a result, they take the focus off of racism and racial discrimination and place it on gender identity and sexuality. The impact of this is that it ignores or discredits the experiences, as well as takes up space for individuals that are impacted by both gender and race.

While intersectionality was hardly mentioned as a topic taught to children, one white mother commented on “the demise of the white women”. Stating that:

**“I feel the demise of the white women all of a sudden you know, as a white woman I thought I was on the right side of the conversation for a long time... white middle-aged women are the enemy right now, and whatever, it's our turn, let's take it you know. And let's not try and defend it and try and really listen to what people are saying, why white women are dangerous, because they're entitlement and belief about themselves and that kind of messed up neoliberal, kind of relationship to self means that you're not actually critiquing self. “ - Gus**

Gus brings up the danger of the white women and previously believing that she was on the “right side of the conversation”. When discussing other social inequalities such as gender it places that child as the victim rather than one experiencing white privilege. Throughout the interview, Gus mentions how she wants to bring up a feminist boy and the ways in which she, as a parent, works against gender stereotypes and norms that her son is exposed to in the media and his peer group. However, as mentioned, the danger of this is that by placing the victimhood on their own child it takes away space that could be used to address issues of race and intersectionality. Gus shows an understanding of the danger of only focusing on gender and not intersectionality, however, does not elaborate or explain the ways in which she teaches her son about intersectionality. Gus’s argument points out that by focusing on one inequality, like gender, it does not allow a person to critique themselves in terms of any unearned privileges that they may have due to their race. Gus demonstrates the ways in which the white families in this study decenter race from intersectionality by primarily focusing on other inequalities such as gender and sexuality.

The decentering of race in intersectional thought is referred to as the “whitening of intersectionality” by Bilge (2013). This concept argues that one of the ways in which people neutralize intersectionality is by making arguments which distract from race and focus on other

inequalities such as gender and class (Bilge, 2013). This includes arguments such as “yes race matters, but what about...?”. Drawing on Bourdieu, Bilge (2013) explains that by removing race from the center it works to condition, reproduce and legitimize the white habitus. That is, the socialization process that conditions and creates whites’ perception, feelings, emotions, and views on racial matters (Bilge, 2013). Ahmed (2012) explains that when discussing or hearing about race becomes too difficult or uncomfortable, intersectionality can be used as a way to deflect the conversation away from race. While the white parents discussed above did not always call on intersectionality when discussing their children, they did commonly veer away from race to talk about the other, more relevant inequalities that impacted their children such as gender. Arguing as though all forms of oppression exist as though on a checklist dilutes the attention given to race, and can act as a form of deflection, or generally turn away from race (Bilge, 2013). In order for children to really understand the ways in which racism is active in Canadian society they also need to comprehend the ways in which race intersects with other social inequalities. This intersectional understanding of race in Canada needs to ensure that race is not decentered, or completely removed. While gender and class are significant oppressions that should be considered, when they are used as a way to dilute conversations on race it no longer teaches or acknowledges a comprehensive picture of racial inequality.

## **Conclusion**

Scholars have argued that colour-blind ideology explains the current racism evident in American society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Burke, 2016; Mueller, 2017). However, not a lot of studies have addressed the ways in which this may present in Canadian society, especially given its official policy on multiculturalism. As demonstrated, many families acknowledge that multiculturalism is more ornamental rather than practiced truly and genuinely. However, the rhetoric and ideology of

multiculturalism is strong enough to impact both the ways in which certain social positions and identities interpret and experience race in Canada. For groups like non-academic immigrants, the myth of multiculturalism strongly contributes to ideas of colourblindness and distancing of themselves from race. These ideas of colourblindness are then passed down to their children who believe that all individuals in Canadian society are treated equally and respected since race and culture do not matter. Additionally, the rhetoric of multiculturalism seems to blur the difference between race and ethnicity. This may be due to the way in which these families perceive difference. While it is nearly impossible for families to deny the existence of racism and discrimination, these conversations may be drowned out by the strong rhetoric of multiculturalism. That is, a strong focus on culture and respecting those different cultures. Canada's multiculturalism policy acts as a double edged sword in which on the one side Canadians acknowledge that they are multicultural and then on the other side they focus on respecting those different cultures. The strong rhetoric of acknowledging the differences and also respecting them spills over conversations of race and racism and how those may be conflated with ideas of culture and ethnicity. This demonstrates a type of colourblindness however one that is different from the type commonly discussed in the American context. The American idea of colourblindness focuses on the idea of being in a "post-racial" era in which race no longer impacts individual's life chances or opportunities. The U.S. in comparison to Canada takes on more of a "melting pot" rhetoric when it comes to cultural differences and therefore, focuses more on racial differences. Canada on the other hand focuses more on different silos of culture, but conflates these differences with race. While none of the families denied the existence of racism in Canada, the issue is that there seems to be a conflation of culture and race. This conflation dilutes discussions of race and therefore also erases conversations on intersectionality.

In addition, in times when race is deliberately discussed or brought up some white families may argue that race does not emerge as prominently in their kid's lives compared to issues of gender or class. Rather, they explain that issues like gender come up more in their kid's lives and these are the issues they tend to focus more on than race and racism. Furthermore, they explain that issues of gender are the types of inequalities that come up more frequently in their children's friend groups. However, focusing on these other oppressions like gender or class, dilutes or erases conversations on race that are essential for the racial socialization of both racialized and white children. Focusing primarily on conversations of gender and class, pushes race talk to the sidelines and treats it more as an inequality on a check list of issues rather than something central impacting both white and racialized children. Instead, parents should be including race in their discussions of other inequalities and engaging in conversations addressing intersectionality. When deploying conversations of intersectionality it is imperative that families are centering race in their conversations, and acknowledging the privilege they may have and their positionality in the constructed social hierarchy in Canada.

While Canada is generally praised for its policy on multiculturalism, these families demonstrate the ways in which this policy hyper-focuses on cultural differences and blurs out conversations on race and racism. The families represented in this chapter did not discuss the ways in which they engage with issues like dissecting their own whiteness, and institutional racism in Canada. While it is worthy to promote ideas of respect among cultures, it is also notable that parents should be engaging in discussions that focus on race and how racial identities may intersect with other inequalities. For children to really understand race and racism in Canada it is important that race is not diluted or hidden under discussions of ethnicity and other social inequalities like gender, sexuality or socioeconomic status. In addition, these conversations on racial socialization



should also include discussions on institutional racism and the ways in which institutions and structures impact varying races differently. In order for children to understand race and racism in Canada, they also need a critical and engaging understanding of the way in which racism is built into Canadian structures, resulting in the persistence and maintenance of systemic racism.

## **CHAPTER 5: HOW FAMILIES FEEL AND UNDERSTAND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM DIFFERENTLY**

The year of 2020 saw some of the largest and the most sustained protests across the world for racial justice in the Black Lives Matter movement, this was followed by the coming year in which mass graves were discovered at previous residential schools. Both racial injustices were hard to miss if one was not living under a rock given it got massive media and social media attention. Not surprisingly, this increased attention and participation in the movement meant that it was nearly impossible for families to ignore the existence of racism both in American and Canada. With this increased attention came more discussions on issues such as institutional racism. For both parents and their children terms like “institutional racism” and “systemic racism” became more commonplace than prior to the summer of 2020. While these terms are significant to the BLM movement, one could argue that not everyone really understands what exactly these terms mean. For instance, different families may have varying understandings of and experiences with systemic racism. Before discussing and analyzing the ways in which certain families differed in their understandings and teachings of systemic and institutional racism it is important to outline what exactly these terms mean, as well as their significance to family racial socialization practices.

### **What is Institutional Racism or Systemic Racism?**

While there is literature explaining the differences between institutional and systemic racism, for the sake of this chapter the two terms will be used interchangeably as the intricacies between the two concepts does not add to or deepen the discussion in this chapter. Institutional racism, or systemic racism, explains the ways in which racism is sown into the fabric of society and saturates each of the structures. Feagin describes that “U.S. society is an organized racist whole with complex, interconnected, and interdependent social networks, organizations, and institutions

that routinely imbed racial oppression” (2006, p.16). While Feagin specifically discusses the American context, this definition of systemic racism can be applied to all “racialized societies”, including Canada. Bonilla-Silva notes that racialized societies refers to “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or race” (1997, p.469). This also constitutes one of the dimensions of systemic racism that Feagin draws out; racial hierarchy. The other dimensions of systemic racism include the white racial frame, alienated social relations, constant struggle and resistance, whites’ unjust enrichment and lastly, related racial domination. These dimensions of systemic racism help us to understand the ways in which racism is not only embedded in the social relations, structures, and institutions, but also how racism is reproduced and maintained in racialized societies. In addition to these mechanisms, scholars argue that the racialization and ordering of certain groups occurred in tandem with constructions of class and gender (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Crenshaw, 1991). This brings in the significance of intersectionality in understanding the ways in which institutional racism not only involves all individuals, but also how it places certain individuals into a hierarchy shaped by multiple, intersecting modes of inequality.

Bonilla-Silva, along with many other scholars, offer another way of understanding the way in which racism operates in today’s society. Colour-blind ideology is argued to explain the “new racism” compared to the Jim Crow era (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Mueller, 2017; Forman, 2004). Colour-blind ideology refers to the idea that individuals believe that race is no longer an issue impacting society. Expanding off of colourblindness, other scholars like Forman explain another frame of colourblindness; racial apathy. Racial apathy refers to the “denial of emotions by focusing on the absence of human-heartedness or denial of care” (2004, p.50). Forman (2004) explains that as colour-blind ideology becomes more hegemonic in society, individuals are becoming more

indifferent to racial inequalities. Racial apathy generally can be understood as a particular dislike or lack of sympathy for out-group members (Forman, 2004). According to Forman, this indifference to racial discrimination and inequality may be expressed for two reasons. First, white individuals may view racial minorities who experience difficulties as having either individual or group deficiencies, which justify their disadvantaged positions (Forman, 2004). Forman (2004) explains that this reasoning is similar to the idea of the “undeserving poor” in which the deserving poor includes white, working class individuals. The second reason may be that individuals are ignorant about the persistent nature of racial and ethnic inequality in society (Forman, 2004). This reasoning demonstrates the ways in which whites enact their white privilege as having the ability to be ignorant about racial issues, meaning that these inequalities are not ones that impact them personally. While whiteness does not encompass all aspects and mechanisms of institutional racism, it is a rather significant part of it.

Scholars excavating systemic racism, like Feagin and Bonilla-Silva, recognize and explain the ways in which whites benefit and preserve institutional racism in racialized societies like America and Canada. While institutional racism has roots in history, it continues to be normalized and perpetuated in today’s society. This is more eloquently explained in Feagin’s discussion on the white racial frame. The white racial frame refers to a hegemonic, overarching white worldview that has been elaborated by or imposed on most individuals, therefore becoming the dominant racial frame (Feagin, 2013). The significance of the white racial frame in relation to institutional racism and family racial socialization practices is that many children may be learning it without even consciously realizing it. The white racial frame does not exist apart from everyday experiences and racial practices that come from it, but rather is a part of the larger system of oppression (Feagin, 2013). Since institutional racism is hegemonic and whiteness acts as the

dominant racial frame in society many individuals may not realize that they are either participating in the reproduction of racism, or fully acknowledge the unearned privileges that are awarded to them. Furthermore, families' understanding of institutional racism may differ depending on how they interact with societal structures and institutions. The importance of realizing and addressing institutional racism, including teaching children about it, is that if it goes unacknowledged it maintains the persistence of racism and reinforces the white racial frame. By not addressing or teaching children about institutional racism they may reproduce and reinforce structural inequalities that impact racialized families and their children. As will be argued in this chapter, it is imperative that each family engages with these discussions and does so on a continuous and consistent level. While each of the families engaged with institutional racism in some way, the ways in which they each understood and taught the concept to their children varied according to race. The sections below will further analyze and discuss the differing ways in which these families comprehended and interacted with systemic racism.

### **White Families and Institutional Racism**

White families have different social relations and social interactions with societal institutions and structures than racialized families. When asked about the ways in which parents understand racism in Canada and to provide an example, many white parents pointed out issues such as unequal hiring practices, police brutality, and recognizing the race of people in positions of power. While all of these examples are part of institutional racism, white parents especially focused a lot of their discussions on whiteness and more specifically, white privilege. They commented on the ways in which whites generally have white privilege in Canadian society, and also pointed out the white privilege their own children have (whether their children were aware of it or not). It became evident that discussions of institutional racism largely focused on whiteness

and white privilege for them. That is, they understood the issue of systemic racism in a similar fashion as to the way it is discussed and portrayed in the media or schools. Generally white families seemed to conflate ideas of whiteness and institutional racism. However, as demonstrated above, institutional racism has several mechanisms and aspects to it outside of just whiteness. When asking one white mother about the ways in which racial inequality exists in Canada, she explains:

**“I think economically it's one of the biggest ways it is expressed. Who gets jobs... Why in my division are there only white people that are hired? Why are there only white people that even interviewed, ya know. It doesn't add up right? It doesn't add up to what the numbers actually say. So why in spheres are most of the leadership all white, ya know, this is a town where there's at least 33% people of color, in this city, so why is that, why are those percentages not represented in every sphere of our work.” - Gus**

Gus passionately discusses issues surrounding unequal hiring and representation in the workforce, including in her own profession. Her example of racial inequality focuses both on white privilege and racial discrimination in job markets. While this is a significant aspect of systemic racism and the persistence of racial hierarchy, Gus does not discuss or mention other dimensions of systemic racism. For instance, missing conversations include those regarding the ways in which institutional racism is hegemonic or issues of racial hierarchy and domination. Gus mentions the racial inequality she sees in her own job but does not discuss or mention ways in which her whiteness and her social position may either contribute to or challenge existing racial inequalities. Gus notes that lessons on whiteness and white privilege are one's she hopes that her children are also learning, and that they do confront and engage in these discussions. She explains later in the interview that her hope is that her son grows up to be a feminist and meets people that challenge him. When interviewing her twelve year-old son, Bob, he does mention whiteness and racial inequality. Specifically, when asked what he has learned about privilege he states:

**Bob: Yeah, that there is white supremacy and that's a thing so like, I don't know how long ago it was like maybe 50 years ago when there was those stores that didn't let people with dark skin or brown skin in, and only white people were allowed in.**

**Mel: Yeah, um, have you learned anything about privilege more recently?**

**Bob: Um yeah, just that like people sometimes treat people differently, which they shouldn't.**

What is interesting about Bob's conceptualization about institutional racism and whiteness is that he starts from a historical point, rather than contemporary. A study done by Vittrup (2018) found that when white mothers were talking to their kids about race and racism, they would either include conversations that were not directly focused on race or discussed these topics as historical events rather than ongoing social issues. While Gus did not mention much regarding the historical or contemporary nature of her teachings on race, her son seems to understand that racism is rooted in history with lingering racial inequities that still exist to the current day. However, in regards to institutional racism, Bob's comprehension of it seems to simply focus on general whiteness and white privilege. Similar to Gus, Bob does not interrogate the ways in which his own whiteness relates or his participation in systemic racism.

While white privilege is a significant and large part of institutional racism, especially in racialized societies such as Canada and the U.S., there are other aspects or mechanisms of systemic racism that were not mentioned or exemplified by the white families. This same understanding or discussion of systemic racism was also seen in another white family in which the mother discusses white privilege but also notes that she is not really sure how her children comprehend the issue. When asking Bob (white mother with same name as child mentioned above) how she believes her two daughters understand their own whiteness, she states that:

**“When the kids were younger I hung out with the nannies and hearing their stories and like what they go through, the kids... were aware that things are not equal and that they have privilege and do they know it because of their skin colour or their privilege, I don't know.” – Bob**

Throughout the interview Bob explained the ways in which she tries to teach her children about current events regarding race but also about their white privilege. When discussing racial inequality between their family and the nannies that they have interacted with, she explains that she tries to teach her two white girls that they have privilege due to their whiteness. However, Bob reiterates that while she as a white mother understands that her children have privileges not afforded to everyone because of their race, she does not know how much of that her children have internalized. Furthermore, Bob's discussions on institutional racism seem to go hand in hand with concepts of white privilege. Rather than including other mechanisms such as the white racial frame, alienated social relations, racial hierarchy or resistance, large scale racial inequality is taught to the children as primarily an issue of white privilege. Their discussions on white privilege or systemic racism do not explain the ways in which social networks, organizations and institutions work interconnectedly and interdependently to continuously perpetuate racism in society. While interviewing Bubbletea and Banana, Bob's two daughters aged 11 and 8 respectively, they demonstrated the way in which they understand racial inequality:

**Mel: Okay, so then do you think that the colour of a person's skin matters?**

**Bubbletea: No!**

**Banana: No!**

**Mel: No?**

**Banana: But some people do, but I don't!**

**Mel: Mhm, and in what ways do you think it matters for other people?**

**Bubbletea: Um... I feel like for white people they just want to be powerful so they're like well those people are black so, you know...**

**Mel: Do you think that all groups of people are treated the same?**

**Bubbletea: No?**

**Mel: Which groups aren't treated the same?**

**Bubbletea: Um... well, like the Black people because they're not treated like the white people.**

**Banana: What? Well it could have been the other way around.**

Bubbletea and Banana explain that while race does not matter to them personally they understand that to some other people race matters. They explain that whites want to remain



powerful and that is one of the reasons they treat racialized individuals unfairly. Their conceptualization of systemic inequality mirrors the focus of white privilege that was demonstrated in Bob's (white mother) interview. Similar to the other white child, they do not talk about their own whiteness and the ways that they may contribute to racial systems of oppression in society. Rather, they talk about other white people and ways in which they try to maintain their own privileges over other individuals.

While most white parents seemed to stop at white privilege when explaining systemic or institutional racism, one white mother did mention another aspect of institutional racism but noted it was difficult to explain to her daughter. Constance explains:

**“...one of the things she struggled with conceptual I would say over the last, maybe starting around 8, maybe earlier, is that she cannot wrap her head around how anybody could be racist, or like she just can't, like how could anybody think that these were reasons and so that leads to both conversations about ways in which something can be racist or without, or sexist, without the person whose advocating that view necessarily understanding it that way right? That they don't see themselves as racist!” – Constance**

Constance explains how when teaching her daughter about racism one of the more difficult conversations to have is in regards to the hegemonic aspect of institutional racism. Specifically, she argues that it is difficult to explain to her daughter the ways in which racism is hegemonic and is seen as “normal” or “rational” when living in a racialized society. Constance is one of the only white parents to bring up this aspect of systemic racism. In comparison, this aspect was one commonly mentioned and brought up by racialized families. However, while Constance mentions that this is a difficult concept for young children she also explains that some of their teachings have focused on ideas of white privilege. While the hegemony of racism in society is brought up in Constance explanations of racial socialization it does not seem to be a central focus or something that they consistently engage with. Constance explains that those teachings are also intermingled

with other issues that are relevant to her daughter's life. Generally it seems that for the white families in this study ideas of systemic racism and white privilege are conflated as being the same thing. More specifically, that conversations on white privilege encompass all aspects or mechanisms of institutional racism. This may communicate to children that if they only address their white privilege then racism will no longer be an issue impacting society, and while this is a valiant effort, this does not address the various ways in which racism operates and is maintained in society.

In addition to white parents conflating institutional racism and whiteness when teaching their children about racism in Canada, they also frequently talked about "whites" as those whites out there in society. By not personally interrogating their own whiteness they do not acknowledge or bring attention to the ways in which their whiteness may impact how and what they teach their kids about systemic racism. For instance, white families generally learn about issues of systemic racism from sources such as educational systems and the media. While in comparison, racialized families learn about systemic racism from their own lived experiences of it. This difference inevitably influences the type of racial socialization children receive from their parents. As a result, white families seemed to generally discuss whiteness as an issue that is "out there" but rarely interrogated their own whiteness and own privileges in relation to their children or family. Specifically for the children of these white families, race was an issue that existed outside of their personal lives.

Sam and Sarah discuss the ways in which their kids understand race, in which they comment that their children probably understand these issues through the lens of culture and ethnicity rather than strictly race. In addition, they also explain the ways in which they see discrimination and racism in their own personal lives. What is interesting is that while Sam and

Sarah both critique multiculturalism and the way in which racism is silent in Canada, they do not go further to interrogate their own whiteness and how that may impact the way their children learn about these issues. While they make a point to teach their children about privilege, Sam still points out that their kids may not really understand systemic racism, especially in relation to their own personal lives. Sam explains:

**“I'd say that they both aren't as aware of the racism that some of their friends may face. Just sort of like what Sarah was talking about, about her boyfriend... you know, I think they both, they live in these bubbles in these schools where, you know, multiculturalism is definitely valued and there's a lot of diversity in people and people are from everywhere and so that seems like normal to them. But I don't think that they're as aware, I mean, they've studied and they know like if you asked them about racism, but I don't think they have a real sense of the kind of structural and behavioural challenges that people of other races face because the context in which they're dealing with this great diversity of people is that diverse, well our diverse welcoming places.” –Sam**

Sam explains that while his kids may know generally what racism is and would be able to identify it, they do not interrogate or are cognizant of the ways in which systemic racism impacts and shapes the lives of the people around them. More specifically, the ways in which systemic racism orders individuals even in a multicultural society like Canada. Again, while white parents may work to teach their children about racial inequality and white privilege, these white families seem disengaged and disconnected from really interrogating their own whiteness as part of teaching their children about issues of systemic racism. Even in instances where white parents did mention addressing their own whiteness it seems like they stopped at identifying it. Rarely did these parents discuss the ways in which they put their teachings into action. White families demonstrate a textbook definition of institutional racism and one that allows them to distance themselves from really engaging with it. Like Sam explains, while his white children may understand racism they see it as an issue impacting others and not something that impacts their own personal social relations. Something that white children do not seem to be learning is how

institutional racism and their own whiteness interact and are present and real in their own daily lives. Furthermore, how their own white privilege is part of a larger, complex and interconnected system that works to maintain racial hierarchy. The lack of racial consciousness in these white children means that they do not acknowledge and notice the ways in which their racialized friends and peers experience inequality and discrimination in their daily lives. As will be discussed in the section below, these white children may not completely comprehend the way in which racialized individuals “feel race” in their day to day lives.

### **Racialized Families and Institutional Racism**

While none of the families seemed to teach their kids all the mechanisms of systemic racism, it is important to note the significantly different ways in which the families did talk about the concept. White families commonly referred to white privilege when discussing racism. This is quite different to the way in which racialized families discussed the issue. Racialized families talked about it as an issue that encompasses all of society and the role everyone plays in it. In addition, racialized families discussed the ways in which they personally experienced systemic racism, and also the ways in which it impacts their children in their daily lives. Racialized parents provided numerous examples of the ways in which structural inequalities impacted how their children could act, where their children could go and the ways in which they believe these inequalities need to be addressed.

One racialized family noted some of the difficulties of raising a Black boy. This family frequently talked about their experiences of discrimination and the types of teachings and lessons they were trying to give their son. One of these included how he should act in certain spaces, that is, how a racialized boy should act in order to more easily interact with white individuals and white

structures. After asking Marissa if she feels there is anything they as parents believe they have to warn their racialized child about, she explains:

**“ Yeah so, we try to tell him like that he's just a kid right now, and he's always with us but as he gets older he won't be able to make like, he can't be loud and obnoxious or like wear his hoodie over his head. Like we tell him not to do that just to get him in the habit of that. And then when we went to B.C we stopped in some small towns and he was like, really aware that he was different and that he had to like, watch what he was doing and saying because he didn't know who he was surrounded by or the mentality there.” – Marissa**

This family understands institutional racism from personal experiences of interacting with structures and institutions in a racialized society. As Marissa notes, this is something that they encounter in their day to day lives but also when travelling. As parents they are consistently working to mitigate any discrimination that their son may experience. In addition, she also hints at the fact that institutional racism is something that they face no matter where they go. While she states that she does not know what the people or ideology is like in the small town they still work to adhere to the white racial frame to ensure that their son is not perceived as dangerous. For this family and many other racialized families, race is not a distant concept. It is something that impacts their choices and options in society.

In addition to teaching racialized children ways in which to navigate systemic racism and the differential treatment they experience, racialized parents also focus on safe places for their kids. One example of this comes from a racialized mother, Nancy, who tells a story of how her neighbor had a People's Party sign on their lawn and this was a house that her daughter frequently played at. Nancy notes that due to the political parties' values she did not feel that a family that promoted these values would be a safe place for her daughter to be in. She explains:

**“But then this year we organized, I with a couple other activist friends here in Cochrane which is not a very you know, politically active community, it's just a few of us, we all know each other, we organized the BLM rally. So she was a speaker at one of the, she was one of the speakers there, she told her story and like, I was a speaker as well and you know,**

**I spoke about that particular thing. You know, there's a people's party sign 100 yards from me, I don't feel safe, I can't go walking outside because I don't know if they're going to run me over or whatever right? And I said this is a house where my daughter used to play, she used to have playdates there, and now I don't feel safe in my own street.” -Nancy**

Nancy recalls that this was a teaching moment with her daughter as she had to explain what the political party stood for and why that meant her daughter was not safe. Nancy’s teaching of systemic racism is not one that she learned from a textbook but rather from experiencing it in her own life. Knowing that the values a political party hold endangers her and her family Nancy immediately teaches her daughter the ways in which racism presents itself at the structural and political level. Nancy’s twelve year-old daughter, Peyton, was one of the children that demonstrated the most insightful and thorough understanding of institutional racism. She explains:

**“I bring up these like, words like, microaggressions, like everybody should know what that is but there like, what are those? Or like cultural appropriation, what is that? Racial profile, like, racial what again? That kind of stuff. So I have to explain everything and I can't explain it from my point of view because they're just gonna think I'm too intense. So I have to explain it in the way that I would like, explain it to a five year old...” - Peyton**

Not only does Peyton understand the ways in which systemic racism disadvantages certain groups in society, but also the ways in which racism shows up in smaller ways in her own life when she discusses the microaggressions she has experienced. Throughout the interview Peyton discusses the various ways in which she sees inequality in society, however, she was one of the only children to really expand on the ways in which racial inequality exists in her own personal life. Peyton discusses her friend group and the whites in her life, explaining that while she has a concrete understanding of these issues that racialized people face, these are not concepts that her friends are as attuned to. In addition, she explains that these conversations are easier to have with other racialized individuals in her life as they share some similar experiences of interacting with institutional and interpersonal racism. Furthermore, as she states in the quote above, Peyton faces

further struggles when trying to teach her friends about these issues as she comes across as “too intense”. As will be argued later, this demonstrates the various ways in which people “feel race” and also understand issues of institutional racism.

Racialized families commonly talked about the ways in which addressing institutional racism involved everyone, and not just themselves. While white families discussed whiteness and racial inequality in Canada, they rarely mentioned ways in which they believed they could challenge or work against these inequalities. In comparison, racialized families commented on the need for change and even discussed the ways in which they believe this change should come about. The existence and conversations on social justice and change was unique to racialized families in this study. One racialized father notes the way in which he believes society is able to address racism:

**“He needs to have that knowledge because not only at school, but for us we understand more, but then there's people you know, I'm not trying to single out somebody but for the white people right, the kids who don't have as, are not as much knowledgeable as we are because we have been used to multiculturalism, but they need to, those parents need to kind of understand and then those parents need to teach their kids. If they do that then same as like we are doing, then there will not be racism probably.” - The Singh's**

Singh openly states that racial socialization would not make an impact if it is only racialized families that are working to challenge racial systems of oppression. Rather, there needs to be effort by whites made as well. Furthermore, he argues that if whites are also having the same conversations as them in regards to race then maybe racism would not be an issue. Indirectly, Singh acknowledges the ways in which everyone contributes to institutional racism and that likewise, social justice also needs to come from everyone.

This same idea of everyone or every family putting in effort to teach their children about important issues of race and racism was also seen in another racialized family. When asked about how important racial socialization is to him and his family, another racialized father states that:

**“I think it's more than like, it's essential! And it's essential not only coming from the parents but it's essential that it comes from other sources and other people as well. I mean, it means something coming from me, I think it means as much or more for their white members to talk about it too to them. I think it's important for their, my like, my family, my brother, sister, all of them to talk about it as well. So that it's not just a, it doesn't feel like this is a one off event right?” - Manu**

Similar to the Singh's, Manu explains that these teachings cannot just be happening in the racialized communities, but rather should be happening in all families. As both fathers explain, systemic racism being a large, societal phenomena which everyone plays a part in means that everyone needs to be working to challenge racialized notions and ideologies. Racialized families' understanding of institutional racism not only impacts the ways in which they teach their children about it but also the ways in which they believe it should be dismantled and addressed. As Manu states, the importance of every family, regardless of race, teaching their children about race and inequality is that by having these conversations from multiple sources brings race to the forefront and does not make it seem like these conversations are random, one off teaching moments. Rather, race is something that families should be consistently and continuously engaging with in order to enhance and develop children's racial consciousness.

### **Mixed-Race Families and Feeling Race**

White families seemed to conflate issues of white privilege and systemic racism and racialized parents understood the issue from a more personal perspective and focused more on social justice. However, when it comes to mixed-race families, one's in which one parent was white, they demonstrate an understanding of systemic racism that was closer to that of racialized



parents. One explanation for this may be due to the fact that having a racialized member in the family means that they “feel” race close to that of racialized individuals.

This idea of “feeling race” is discussed more intricately by Bonilla-Silva in his presidential address in 2018. Bonilla-Silva (2019) argues that racialized emotions refers to emotions that are related to race that people experience when interacting with others and their world around them. Racialized emotions are the product of race-making and racial interactions, that is, they are shaped by both social relationships and history (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). These racialized emotions do not present an authentic or universal experience of race but rather fluctuate based on local racial politics, the history of white supremacy, and the interethnic relations (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). This not only explains the different understanding and comprehensions of race in the white parents in mixed-race families but also provides insight into the ways in which social context impacts racial consciousness or ideology and racialized emotions but also the ways in which families deal with race in their personal lives.

Individuals that more closely live through experiences that racialized individuals face and manage in their daily lives may identify and sympathize with the racialized emotions of racialized people. The data from the mixed-race families demonstrates that those that feel race in similar or closer ways to racialized individuals have more insightful and meaningful understandings of the mechanisms of systemic racism and how it operates in Canadian society. For instance, one white father discusses institutional racism as an issue that encompasses all of society. Tristen is a white father married to a racialized woman and has two racialized children. Throughout the interview he acknowledged his whiteness and the ways in which his life experiences may be different compared to the rest of his family. When discussing institutional racism he was one of the only white parents

to mention the ways in which systemic racism is hegemonic and something that we all share in whether consciously or unconsciously. He explains:

**“I think its cause we’re told its racism is universally bad so you don't wanna admit it exists. Cause then you're saying you're racist which means you're a bad person right? Which for systemic racism that's not necessarily true, it's more of a... corporate evil thing, like something we all share in...” –Tristen**

As mentioned, while some other white parents would provide examples of systemic racism, commonly referencing occurrences such as unequal hiring practices, or the unequal application of laws, Tristen was one of the only white parents to really discuss or bring up the fact that in a racialized society, systemic racism is something that encompasses all of society. As Tristen explains, it is something that we all share in. Tristen and his wife Anne frequently commented on the sort of “silent racism” that exists in Canadian society. That is, that individuals do not discuss racism since Canada is multicultural and sarcastically remark at the fact that because of the multiculturalism policy Canada could not possibly be racist. They argue that by not discussing racism, especially at the structural and systemic level, it perpetuates and maintains racism in the country.

Another white parent also demonstrated a more critical and insightful understanding of institutional racism in Canada. Kristine, a white mother, is part of a mixed-race family which consists of Indigenous and white family members. When asking Kristine the ways in which she understands racism in Canada she notes:

**“...there's so many examples. I think, you know, my own focus over the last number of years has been really to highlight the Indigenous folks but through my work with immigrant populations unfortunately see domestic violence at a much higher rate and get help at a much lower rate. And our systems are not built to help immigrant women in the same way that we help white women... yeah, I think that the whole way that we do things is structured towards centering men's values and white values and so we hit up against that constantly.” – Kristine**

Kristine not only demonstrates how racism in Canadian society has been built into the structures and institutions but also includes an intersectional understanding of racial inequality. Throughout the interviews parents commonly cited and provided examples of the inequality between Blacks and whites, Kristine is one of the few parents who discusses other vulnerable groups like immigrants and Indigenous people. Kristine's understanding of race could surely be influenced both by her own family members, as well as her career as a social worker. In addition to describing the ways in which both white supremacy and patriarchy are the foundations of Canadian structures and values, she also acknowledges the groups that are most disadvantaged by these structures. While her comprehension of institutional racism focuses on race, it also includes other inequalities that place some groups in more vulnerable positions than others. Kristine challenges the "whitening of intersectionality", which refers to the decentering of race from discussions in accordance with hegemonic post-racial thinking (Bilge, 2013). As a white mother in a mixed-race family, Kristine is well attuned to the issues and emotions that other members in her family face due to their race. As a result, it seems like Kristine's understanding of institutional racism centers on race and the importance of challenging white structures in tandem with other systems of oppression.

Kristine also helps to demonstrate and understand another aspect of "feeling race". When asked in what ways she feels she has to warn her children about inequality Kristine discloses:

**"...not so much my twelve year old but definitely my older kids because they look more Indigenous and so that's definitely a conversation that we had with them quite a few times and continue to have with them as young adults. Because they do get treated differently, because they look Indigenous or sound Indigenous, and so they're more at risk. I think it's important, well as kids it was important that they had some understanding of that. I mean they knew that anyway coz they were treated differently right? But I think opening the conversation almost gave them permission to actually talk about that and to acknowledge that it was real and wasn't just in their heads."** -Kristine

Kristine explains that due to the way some of her children look she has to teach them to act a certain way and that because of their race there are certain advantages and privileges that would not be awarded to them compared to some of their whiter friends. Kristine does not have to explain what systemic racism is to her children as she explains how her kids already know that they will be treated differently from experience. She notes that for her as a parent, it is more important to validate her children's feelings and understanding of the experiences rather than explaining systemic racism. As a parent Kristine's focus is on validating and confirming that the way in which her children feel race is not irrational or made up but is a very real thing that happens to racialized individuals. While as a white mother Kristine will not feel race the same way as her Indigenous children she can still sympathize with their experiences and internalize them into her own understandings and comprehension of race and racism.

Similar to what Bonilla-Silva points out, each of these mixed-race families "feel race" differently. One of the reasons that everyone may feel race differently is the interethnic relations that they have. In these mixed-race families at least one parent is white and as mentioned above, demonstrates an understanding of institutional racism that is closer to that of the racialized families than white families. Other studies such as Hagerman's (2013) research on white kids and the ways in which they understand race concludes that the context in which white kids are raised and the social contexts that they engage with significantly impact their own racial consciousness. She explains that white middle-class parents are able to use their resources to construct racial contexts of white childhood, in which children form their own ideas based on these contexts and the experiences they have in them (Hagerman, 2013). This is an observation that could also be applied to mixed-race families. White parents and children who live with another racialized family member may have differing life experiences depending on the racial context that they engage with.

Furthermore, this specific racial context would inevitably influence the frequency, depth, and ways that they “feel race”.

That being said, there was one white family in the study that presented as an outlier to common understandings and assumptions within critical race theory. Charlotte and her family of five are all white. Charlotte is a stay-at-home mother and her husband works a blue-collar job. Neither of the parents had attended post-secondary education and they now live in a primarily white neighborhood. Charlotte’s family refutes the idea that higher class and higher educational attainment contribute to a more critical and holistic understanding of race and racism. Rather, Charlotte’s family demonstrates an insightful and critically engaged understanding of race that not only translated into the racial consciousness of her children but inspired the continuous learning their whole family engages in. The racial socialization that Charlotte offered her white children varied significantly from other white families in that she engaged with race on a consistent and continuous level. Their racial socialization consisted of constant engagement with discussions on privilege, stereotypes, institutional racism, cultural appropriation and various other topics. One example of this is a story Charlotte tells about a group of Indigenous people and a homeless camp near the railway tracks close to their home. Charlotte explains that one day they went to the grocery store as a family and someone in the grocery store line had said something about the homeless people staying by the railway tracks. The stranger's comment included a remark that the Indigenous people stayed at the homeless camp because it was close to the liquor depot and they could cash in all the beer cans they have been drinking. Although Charlotte was hoping that her kids wouldn’t catch on, she noticed that Naegi tilted her head and heard the racist comment. Charlotte explained that she then had a conversation with her children during which she explained that this is a common stereotype in Canada, that is, that Indigenous people drink a lot and consume drugs, and this is

why they end up homeless. Challenging this stereotype Charlotte goes on to explain to her children that this is not the case. Rather, the homeless people were there to be close to the stores and restaurants in order to get scrap food that would be thrown away. In addition, the homeless people would cash in bottles and cans, however, this was so that they could get money in order to afford essentials, not drink more. Charlotte teaches her children the ways in which race and poverty intersect in that situation. This also including discussions on the historic injustices and current perpetuation of those injustices that leads the Indigenous peoples being relegated to a life of extreme poverty and racism.

This is one of the many stories that Charlotte and her children tell about the ways in which they engage with concepts or race in their daily lives. These meaningful discussions with her kids were also mirrored in her two eldest daughters' understanding of race and racism. While interviewing Naegi and Ezra (11 year old twins) the two girls often discussed the ways in which they see racism in the media, including movies and television shows.

**Naegi: Yeah, like one time [younger sibling] turned on a song where like I'm not sure who it was written by but it was an artist who I knew was white yelling the N-word, so I was like, no!**

**Ezra: And when we were watching the old Peter Pan movie, like the Disney animated one, like when they portrayed First Nations people ...**

**Naegi: - as "savages" and like...**

**Ezra: That's incredibly racist! Do not repeat anything they're saying! Do not do anything they're doing because that's like incredibly, like inaccurate and like racist! And I was like this movie sucks now.**

Throughout their interview Naegi and Ezra frequently interrogated and critically discussed movies and television shows that they had seen or knew of. The two girls demonstrate their understanding of stereotypes and derogatory language, and also demonstrate the ways in which they engage with media that is present in their daily lives. In addition, the two girls also explain

that as they are engaging with issues of race and racism that they see in the media they are also teaching their younger siblings about these issues as well.

Charlotte and her family exemplify a complex understanding of race and racialization, in addition, they set an example for which other white families can follow in order to dismantle racism in Canada. First, as a parent Charlotte continuously engages with discussions of race and racism as they show up in their daily lives. This not only included using real life examples as teachable moments but also thinking through these issues with her children as they happen. Research shows that when parents engage in these meaningful types of conversations with their children regarding race, children's attitudes are more likely to match that of their parents (Vittrup, 2018). So instead of picking up inaccurate or stereotypical information from other sources such as the media or peers, children are learning critical race information from their parents. Secondly, Charlotte and her family are thinking through and addressing race from both a historical and contemporary standpoint. One instance of this is when Charlotte mentions that a motivating factor for teaching her children about issues of race and racism the way she does is due to the connection of her own white family to the slave trade. Upon discovering that her ancestors were connected to the slave trade in Europe she mentioned that she wanted to do something about it not for "brownie points" or to look good, but rather to be on the right side of history. Her motivation is a sense of reparation for the wrongdoing that her family had previously been a part of. As a result, her understanding of race comes from both a historical and contemporary standpoint. Furthermore, Charlotte explains that she understands that people with her education level do not commonly hold these beliefs on race. Rather, she makes a consistent effort to self-monitor and attempts to think through and learn about racial inequalities and justice on her own. She goes on to admit that she does not know everything and may make mistakes but works with her children to understand and

address racial issues as they come up. Charlotte and her family, challenging ideas commonly expressed in critical race theory, set an example of ways in which white families can improve their racial socialization.

## **Conclusion**

While institutional racism is something that involves everyone, each family has varying understanding of it and feels the impact of it differently. For white families the focus was primarily on white privilege, and while not always interrogating their own whiteness, they noted the fact that society is set up to benefit white over racialized individuals. In comparison, racialized families understood institutional racism from personal experiences interacting with others, structures and institutions in society. Racialized families focused primarily on the ways in which institutional racism framed the ways in which they and their children could act, where safe places were, and ways in which to dismantle racism. In addition, the discourse of social justice was unique to the racialized families. Racialized families seemed to call on other families, specifically white families, to also teach their children about race and racism in order to normalize and engage with race in more consistent ways. This is one of the reasons that Charlotte and her family are outliers in the study. While most white families acknowledged that there was racism in Canadian society and that it was important to teach their kids about racism, they did not engage with teachings of race in the same consistent and continuous way as Charlotte's family did.

By putting action into racial socialization and focusing on ways in which families together can engage with racial concepts and ideas in their everyday lives it helps to better teach children notions of equality, resistance and allyship. Race cannot be a line on a checklist of inequalities to touch on and then move on from. Families should be using everyday interactions and events to teach children the ways in which race influences and shapes those parts of their life. This includes



involving children in thinking through these ideas, as they are active agents in their own lives that ultimately form their own ideas about race. By engaging with race at a continuous level it teaches children, especially white children, that race is an issue that involves us all. Race is not just an issue for people of colour but rather something that should be addressed and challenged by all families. This approach to dismantling and addressing issues of racism is similar to suggestions that Hagerman makes in her research. Hagerman (2018) argues that “good” parenting should intersect with being a “good” citizen. This involves white parents restructuring the idea that their own child is more deserving and innocent than other people’s children (Hagerman, 2018). Instead, parents should be placing value on children collectively rather than individually and care about the ways in which “young people as a whole are treated or mistreated, educated or miseducated, supported or marginalized” (Hagerman, 2018, p.210). Continuously focusing on being a good citizen and engaging and interacting with children as they negotiate, interpret and make meaning of the various messages they receive about race, I believe is one way in which families can work towards not only gaining a better understanding of the way in which racism operates in society but also how to dismantle it and work towards a more equitable society.

It is clear from both the ways in which families attempt to teach their children about issues such as multiculturalism in Canada and institutional racism that parents do pass along aspects of their racial ideologies to their children. Whether this means that parents and children both exemplify a colour-blind ideology, understand certain aspects of racism in a specific way, or both engage with race and racism critically on an ongoing level. Another way in which families tried to pass along certain understandings of race to their children is by engaging in the racial socialization process with their kids in racially and ethnic diverse settings. While parents focused on passing down specific lessons, they also believed that their children would learn about race and racism

through contact with others outside of their home. Similar to Winker's racial comprehensive learning, parents in these families also noted that children learn about issues like race from a variety of institutions in society.

## **CHAPTER 6: VARYING EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF CONTACT**

Canada being multicultural means that different ethnicities and races are constantly interacting and mingling. As groups of people learn more about other cultures and races they may develop certain racial attitudes towards the other group (Lilienfeld et al. 2015). As a result, there has been a significant amount of research looking at the ways in which intergroup contact theory operates and mitigates issues of prejudice and discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998; Ruck et al, 2011; Denis, 2015). Most studies either supporting or critiquing contact theory use Allport's concept of intergroup contact theory as the backbone of their research (Pettigrew, 1998; Ruck et al, 2011; Denis 2015). The main principle of Allport's concept of intergroup contact theory is that positive contact between groups can lead to reduced prejudice, however, these interactions need to occur in situations that are marked by certain conditions (Pettigrew, 1998).

Further research analyzed whether other factors such as friendship potential would make contact theory more effective (Bagci et al. 2018). Bagci et al. (2018) used friendship potential to see whether it would improve Turkish participant's attitudes, trust and behavioural intentions towards Syrian refugees. They found that friendship potential with both interaction and intimacy was effective in leading to more favourable attitudes towards Syrian refugees (Bagci et al. 2018). Another study done by Ruck et al. (2011) also looked at the ways in which contact theory affects racial attitudes. They did their research with urban minority children and adolescents to understand how contact theory may impact race-based exclusion in their schools (Ruck et al. 2011). The authors note that majority of research looking at intergroup relations focuses on majority, high status groups and usually focuses on adults rather than children or adolescence (Ruck et al. 2011). Ruck et al. (2011) found that while cross-race friendships improved intergroup attitudes between both majority and minority groups, intergroup contact was more effective for majority status

children. The study found that intergroup contact is connected to children and adolescence deeming racial exclusion as “very wrong” (Ruck et al. 2011, p. 640). As other studies also confirm, contact theory is beneficial for reducing overt prejudice (Denis 2015; Pettigrew, 1998).

Generally there is a large amount of research that supports the effectiveness and benefit of intergroup contact between racial and ethnic groups. However, there is also an overwhelming amount of research which demonstrates the crucial shortcomings of contact theory. These shortcomings are significant and essential for understanding why contact is not enough to reduce prejudice and discrimination. One study done by Thijs and Verkuyten (2014) demonstrates this in terms of interethnic contact. These scholars argue that large amount of diversity provides more opportunities for positive contact between different groups of people, which could lead to more favourable attitudes towards other ethnicities (Thijs and Verkuyten, 2014). However, they explain that while there may be a benefit to interethnic contact this is not enough to promote acceptance and tolerance between groups (Thijs and Verkuyten, 2014). Rather there are several other aspects to contact that would need to be considered. This including factors such as multicultural education in these schools, inclusive school identities, student-teacher relations, peer norms and networks and the role of parents (Thijs and Verkuyten, 2014). This understanding of contact includes a more complete and holistic approach to understanding the way in which contact may impact racial and ethnic attitudes. Thijs and Verkuyten (2014) do bring attention to the critical role that various intermingled institutions have in making contact between races beneficial and effective in addressing racial and ethnic discrimination.

Another study critiquing contact theory also provides a more critical assessment of the theory and points out its biggest and most significant limitation. Vincent (2008) explains that a key point missed in intergroup contact theory is that contact takes place within a broader context

of power relations and reflects those power relations. Vincent (2008) explains that a large assumption of contact theory is that both whites and racialized individuals want contact. Rather, their study found that compared to whites, Black participants recalled negative encounters that led to an awareness of their marginality (Vincent, 2008). While contact can be a context for meaningful interactions, Vincent (2008) explains that these interactions require conscious intervention and leadership rather than expecting that these moments of contact will lead to genuine and helpful conversations regarding race. The lack of acknowledgement of power relations, specifically the privilege that white participants have, in contact theory is furthered in Silliman's work looking at the conflation of contact and colonialism.

Silliman (2005) points out that the uncritical use of contact in contexts which are clearly colonialism has several implications. Specifically "culture contact" is problematic for describing all indigenous-colonial interactions and relations as Indigenous groups experiences of destruction of cultural traditions, heritage, and lives are more politically charged than "contact" implies (Silliman, 2005). The implications of conflating contact and colonialism, as described by Silliman, is that "contact sounds as though entire cultures come into contact via brief encounters; as though the collision happened between autonomous cultures that remained bounded; and as though colonial relations of power, labor, economy and identity carried little weight" (2005, p.68-69). It is important to differentiate between contact and colonialism as in colloquial understandings contact may evoke assumptions of brief interactions rather than long-term contexts that involve "intertwining histories, experiences and structures of colonialism" (Silliman, 2005, p.60). When discussing contact it is important to recognize the way in which the term implies violence and power-free contact.

This argument is further reinforced and exemplified through Denis' work on contact theory in a small-town settler-colonial context. Denis (2015) demonstrates that while contact may be associated with less old-fashioned prejudice (overt hostility) it does not necessarily eliminate whites' superior sense of group position. More specifically, there are three social processes which maintain group position prejudice in whites, including subtyping, ideology-based homophily and political avoidance norm (Denis, 2015). Subtyping refers to the idea that when someone violates a stereotype they are the exception to the rule (Denis, 2015). Ideology-based homophily is the phenomena of befriending individuals with similar racial ideologies regardless of their race (Denis, 2015). And lastly, political avoidance norm is the avoidance of the political aspect of inequality through the lack of discussion (Denis, 2015). This strategy separates the interpersonal from the systemic (Denis, 2015). Denis discusses the fact that whites are able to maintain their superior sense because of historically rooted racial structures that remain in place and as systemic racism and colonialism persist so will whites motivation to maintain their power, resources and status. This is also a key characteristic of colour-blind racism as the "new racism". As Bonilla-Silva explains, colour-blind racism offers an ideological armour to whites in which they are able to maintain their white privilege and superior position without coming across as overtly racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Parallel to Bonilla-Silva's explanation of white privilege and superiority in the "new racism", Vincent explains that "'contact' in a context in which the overall hegemony of whiteness remains intact is reassuring" to whites (Vincent, 2008, p.1437).

While the families in this study did not directly refer to Allport's ideas and concepts of intergroup contact, each of the parents discussed contact in colloquial ways. Generally, when parents mentioned contact they referred to their children being in contact with other children and adults of different ethnicities and races than them. There were four general ways in which contact

came up in the parent interviews including normalizing difference, identity formation, preparation for racism, and travel/racial tourism.

### **Difference as Normal**

One of the most common ways in which parents talked about contact in regards to their children was that their kids having contact with other races and ethnicities normalizes difference for them. For instance, when asking one white mother how she believes her white daughters relate to children of other races she notes:

**“I wouldn't say it's a difference because they growing up, you know, it's like children growing up with the media, right? When they grow up with the internet, you just growing up with that. You know, it's not like what I had, where all the white people only were, you know... but they... they... my children they different because they growing up with that. It's normal for them. For me, it wasn't normal but for them, it's normal. They growing up. I never seen you know, my children say something you know, anything about race negatively or something you know.” – T**

T explains that while she was growing up diversity was not as common in her life as it is for her children. Rather, her children are growing up with immense racial and ethnic diversity around them and because of this difference is not anything shocking or outside of the norm for them. Instead diversity is the norm for her children. T goes on to explain in the interview that since her children are in constant contact with other ethnicities and races she does not feel as though she has to talk to her children about issues of race as her children have never said “anything about race negatively”. Vittrup (2018) finds that one of the main reasons for white parent's reluctance to discuss issues of race with their children lies in their perception of their child's lack of bias. More specifically, if they believe their children have never or will never say anything negatively about race they are less motivated to engage in explicit racial discussions with their children (Vittrup, 2018). Similarly, another white parent makes the argument that contact normalizes difference to

her children. When asked if her children had ever asked her questions about race, specifically why individuals have different skin colours she replied:

**“No, and I think just because they've been surrounded by people with different skin colors their whole lives. Like one of their caregivers was a women in my neighborhood, she was like sixteen at the time, a babysitter, and she was Sri Lankan. So they might have asked her, but I think from their moment of kind of cognizance, they have just never seen anything different.” – Gus**

Gus points out that because her children have always seen difference and been in close contact with individuals from other cultures and races this is not something that they questioned or were curious about. Simply, to them, it is just the way it is in their life. Diversity and difference is seen as a completely normal aspect of their life and because of that, it seems to hinder some of the deeper and more meaningful conversations about race and racism in Canada that children could be engaging in. Similar to what is seen in the literature, these families demonstrate that contact does normalize difference to their children and as a result it reduces overt hostility towards other ethnicities and races. However, while it diminishes some of the old-fashioned prejudice between white and racialized children, the idea of contact as being beneficial and effortlessly teaching their children acceptance also hinders some of the more essential and critical conversations that parents could be having with their kids. Specifically, by assuming that contact is enough to teach their children about racial equality, parents may not be consistently and constantly engaging in conversations regarding issues such as institutional racism and privilege. This can be especially detrimental to white children as when they are not learning about these issues, whiteness pervades and is maintained.

Interestingly, the theme of normalizing difference is also seen in conversations with racialized parents. Manu, a racialized father, explains the benefit he sees in his children having



contact with different races and ethnicities. However, it is important to note that compared to white families Manu is also constantly and consistently focusing on issues such as institutional racism with his children. When asked if the school his children attend is racial diverse Manu replies:

**“I mean, they're in French Immersion, I mean their class is pretty diverse, there are many families and many kids in their classroom where one or both parents do come from a visible minority backgrounds, and they experience it through a lot of the names in the classroom where they're not all like Michael and Jennifer. So I think that is helpful too, that learning these names and, in the community we live in it's pretty affluent and many people look the same but also there's lots of diversity around you just need to keep on looking.” – Manu**

Similar to other parents, Manu also uses the explanation of contact as normalizing difference to his children. Specifically, in the example he provides he notes that having children with different names that are not as common exposes his children to these different cultures. He explains that being exposed to these names is beneficial for his children to learn them and see them as normal. In doing this, parents intend to teach their children that all races and ethnicities are equal and that racial and ethnic groups that are different from their own should not be seen or treated differently. Inadvertently, however, this form of socialization flattens differences, as well as hides and undermines the differential treatment of minorities based on race. Similar to colour-blind racism, normalizing diversity leads to an understanding that race does not matter. If all races and ethnicities are perceived as normal it minimizes the attention given to the unequal opportunities and treatment that some racial minorities experience over others, and therefore promotes a colour-blind understanding of race.

### **Contact and Identity Formation**

The idea of contact normalizing difference was overwhelmingly seen in each of the parent interviews. This was something noted by both white and racialized parents in some way. In comparison, another theme under contact that was mentioned in the interviews was the impact

contact would have on a child's identity formation and development. This idea was only brought up by racialized or mixed-race parents however. When asking one racialized father how important he believes it is that his children hang out with kids of other races and ethnicities he explains:

**“Oh it's very important because that way, like especially as kids because as, I hope, what I'm, so I believe as right now... I don't think they see that unless the parents actively tell them at home like okay you're Black and the other classmates are white, or you're brown, or you're from the Philippines, I don't think kids see that at this age. So it's really important that at this age they feel that everybody is the same. They might not feel the same way when they start working or go find a job, or get treated differently in the outside world but at this age, at least they feel, I feel like it's really important that they see it that way. Other than the other side of the fence where you looked at the differences.” – Mad Fish**

Mad Fish points out that while his kids are young it is important that to them difference is completely normal and does not matter, this resembling a colour-blind approach to race. However, he also notes that as his children grow up and start coming into contact with groups outside of their inner circle of friends and family their difference will become much more noted and impactful. More specifically, Mad Fish explains that as they encounter various institutions and people in the “outside world” they will start to be treated differently based on their race and ethnicity. While at their current age his children may believe that there is no difference between them and their racially diverse friends, increased contact with larger institutions and structures may change that perception of their identity. Similar arguments were made by another parent in regards to contact and the impact it would have on his mixed-race daughter. Tristen notes:

**“I don't know, like with us being on the farm a lot and now, I mean she's had almost a year under \*laughs\* I was gonna say house arrest but it's her form of quarantine, that's the word I'm looking for! Um... if it'll increase her contact as she gets older, so I don't know if she would engage with more of this. Like, I would expect if she gets older she'll start getting people trying to decide, frankly, what she is right? You know... is she white? Is she Chinese? When she was little she looked really First Nations-sy like... like it's hard, yeah I'm assuming she'll get that. I don't know, and I don't know which side she takes ... she doesn't seem to be strongly one or the other.” – Tristen**

Tristen and Anne, a mixed-race couple, recall previous experiences of times their daughter has come in contact with racist comments that they heard either on the media or books and how those may influence her conception of race. Tristen then goes on to note that while their daughter now lives in a type of bubble, as she comes into contact with institutions and people outside of her circle she may get more attention and inquisitions on her race. As parents, Tristen and Anne note some concerns regarding what future contact will do on Yak's formation of her identity. Specifically, the part of her identity in which individuals will try to impose a label onto her and potentially "other" her. While for some families racial and ethnic contact between children is seen as a positive aspect of their development, for some racialized and mixed-race parents contact can also cause some anxiety and concern in regards to the type of impact others may have on their child. Contact is taken more lightly and seen as beneficial to those that are not marked as "different" or "exotic". For racialized children and their families, the idea of increased contact may also correlate with experiences of exclusion, labeling, and discrimination. Another racialized parent also comments on another aspect of contact that can be worrisome or disheartening for them. When asking Nancy how important she believes racial diversity to be for her daughter's understanding of race and ethnicity, she explains:

**"I think it's tremendously important! I think that she needs to make sense of who she is and not trying to assimilate. I think that's my greatest fear, is that she would lose herself in the process of learning a new culture, learning a new language, all those kinds of things right? And you know, this stage of racial socialization where she's at right now, like it's so important, like its adolescents and this is where, this where it's going to happen, like this is where we'll see what happens with her and to her identity."** – Nancy

Nancy explains contact with different racial and ethnic groups is very important for children to form their sense of self. However, she also notes that there are some worries that come with her daughter learning about the dominant culture in Canada. With increased contact and

continuous exposure, Nancy explains that she worries her daughter will assimilate into the dominant culture and lose herself. By being othered or seen as different, some children may feel pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture, which in Canada would be whiteness. For Nancy it is important that her daughter keeps her culture and maintains that core aspect of her identity while also still learning about other ethnicities and races. In this case, contact can cause some issues in regards to assimilating into the dominant ethnicity or race. This undoubtedly resulting in identity development issues in her racialized daughter. As demonstrated, contact is not perceived the same way by all families with a main difference being between white and racialized families. For white parents contact is seen as helpful in normalizing difference and diversity to their white child, hence, contact is easily promoted and encouraged. But, contact can be a place of anxiety and worry for racialized parents as they manage complicated and difficult issues of identity, othering, and discrimination.

### **Contact and Anticipation for Racism**

In addition to contact causing some parents to consider the impact it will have on their children's identity formation and development, a couple racialized and mixed-race parents also expressed concern about the discrimination and racism their children would experience with increased contact. One mixed-race family noted that:

**“Yeah so we try to tell him like that he's just a kid right now, and he's always with us but as he gets older, he won't be able to make like, he can't be loud and obnoxious or like wear his hoodie over his head, like we tell him not to do that just to get him in the habit of that. And then when we went to B.C we stopped in some small towns and he was like really aware that he was different and that he had to like watch what he was doing and saying because he didn't know who he was surrounded by or the mentality there.” – Marissa**

Marissa and her partner David discussed a recent family trip they had taken to British Columbia and pointed out that one of the things they try and teach their son is how to manage

perceptions of him or the way in which he may come across to other individuals. The two parents discussed the ways they had to address issues of racism with their son's school but also practices they have had to take on to mitigate any discrimination that their son may experience while travelling. Furthermore, Marissa explains that practices like not wearing his hoodie up are things they do because they do not know the mentality of other people they may come in contact with. Contact for their racialized son means having to mitigate common stereotypes and try to come across the least bit threatening.

Another racialized family also notes the impact contact has on their children, specifically, the importance of contact for preparing their children for discrimination and racism. When asked how important they believe racial diversity to be in their children's life a racialized father argues:

**“I think it is very important for him to grow up and then learn about different cultures and all that, because I think it prepares him not to be... prepares him to be more knowledgeable about everything. And then in future if anything like, if he ever faces racism or anything like that, I feel like he is more prepared to it. Rather than growing up, I mean growing up in a small town or somewhere where it's just one race that you see every day and you know, when you move out from there then you get exposed to something right.” – The Singh's**

The Singh's, similar to the previous family, connect contact with the need to prepare for racism and discrimination. However, they expand to say that with increased contact their children will become more knowledgeable about issues of race and ethnicity. The example they provide is that if they grew up in the small homogenous town they may not be exposed to as much difference. As a result, they may not be as prepared to handle issues of racism when they do come up or identify certain actions as racism or microaggressions. Contact for them means preparing their son for not only inevitably experiencing racism, but also being able to cope and identify issues of racism when they come up. This is a stark comparison to the way in which whites parents discussed contact. While for these racialized parents contact leads to preparing their children for

discrimination, including identifying it, for white parents contact was mentioned as a practice that would simply normalize difference to their children. When discussing contact white parents mentioned little about learning from racialized communities and having meaningful discussions regarding change and racial equality. Instead, another way in which white parents mentioned contact was through the idea of travel.

### **Contact through Travel**

In several interviews parents mentioned that they encouraged their children to travel and be exposed to a variety of different cultures. In comparison to the other themes the idea of contact through travel was primarily brought up by white mothers. For instance, one white mother explains:

**“I’m trying to think what else I do... eventually travel. She’s been to Yellowknife, so when we were there, we went to like I forget what it’s called, but the big museum and that talks a lot about First Nations and residential schools. So I think yeah like going to theatre and museums, art galleries, that’s another way to have conversation and then eventually we will be travelling more. Like she’s done a lot of stuff in Canada, but not outside. But we can’t do that right now obviously. Camping is not exactly a great way to like talk about racism, because it is typically a bunch of white Albertan’s, so yeah.” – Anne**

Anne recalls the resources and practices she utilizes to teach her young, white daughter about racism in Canada. She explains that while their family does quite a bit of camping this does not provide her daughter with a lot of contact with diversity as it is “typically a bunch of white Albertan’s”. Instead, her hope is that eventually she will be able to travel internationally with her daughter and expose her to varying different cultures and races. Various scholars such as Vats (2014) explain the ways in which travel or racial tourism can be understood through the lens of colonialism and imperialism. Vats explains that “outsiders may take difference as they please to enrich their own cultural knowledge and worldly experiences” (2014, p.125). While Vats’s article focuses primarily on the racial performances in high fashion their analysis of travel and evoking

images of the “other” can be applied here. Commonly discussed in tourism literature is the concept of the “tourist gaze”. Vats explains that the “tourist gaze functions from the outside, taking in parts of the exotic culture, often divorcing images from their contexts and histories” (2014, p.125). While white parents may be encouraging travel and tourism for their children in order to learn about other groups of people, they do not counter the fact that white tourists consume beauty through the lens of whiteness and colonial history. Anne, for instance, discusses a recent trip their family took to a museum to learn about Indigenous history and residential schools but does not discuss the ways in which travelling and being tourists itself is part of power relations in racialized societies. She also does not go on to explain the ways in which they work to decolonize themselves and recognize the traumatic history of Indigenous people. Rather, they go to museums and take in knowledge of the places they visit but do not follow up with action. Another white mother also discusses contact through travel:

**“I think we talk about that with them [her children] but the reality is that they are part of the dominant culture. They don't live that experience they just haven't got it. So I mean, part of my big thing is like you will go to University in a different city, you will travel the world, like we are going to ensure that you step outside of what you know because by doing that you will learn something different about yourself. So that's kind of my hope a little bit, is that I just push them into the learning opportunities and that they continue to call me out cause we'll continue to grow and evolve right?” – Gus**

Similarly, Gus mentions that her hope is that her children will experience other cities and countries. More specifically, her goal in encouraging her children to travel is that it will help develop their own identity and ideally, they will learn something about themselves by stepping outside what they already know. As Vats explains, tourism acts specifically to enrich their own cultural knowledge and worldly experiences, rather than engaging in deeper conversations and experiences that work to counter and address unequal structures and institutions. Gus explains that the purpose for her kid’s contact with other cultures is mainly self-serving as it is to better their

own child's worldview and perspective. In this form of tourism individuals go to other countries and nations, take what they need and have little regard for the impact of their contact or whether individuals in these areas desire to have contact. Contact through travel and tourism in general are also wrapped up with discussions of the "other" and representation (Hall and Tucker, 2004). Hall and Tucker (2004) explain that otherness is essential in tourism, that is, otherness makes a destination worthy of consumption. They argue that travel and tourism both reinforces and is embedded in post-colonial relationships, this including issues of identity, contestation and representation (Hall and Tucker, 2004). The idea of travel is commonly associated with fantasies of their tourist destinations including what the country, city and people that live there are like. Vats (2014) explains that tourists are voyeurs who engage in the pleasurable consumption of difference and may consume a white-washed version of their tourist destination. Tourism and travel can deemphasize and distract from the traumatic and racial histories of these places (Vats, 2014). So while these white parents are encouraging their children to travel far and go outside of their comfort zones, there is little discussion on the ways in which travel and racial tourism contribute to ongoing colonialism. In addition, these parents also do not mention the ways in which their kids should critically engage with the sights, people, and events that they take in. Specifically, the ways in which certain tourist destinations may be white-washed and lack the reality and histories of people living in these places.

Another problematic aspect to contact through travel is exemplified in a separate interview with another white mother who claims:

**"I never, you know, thought about race. It's about humanity I would say. So I would like to take them to poor countries and serve there like a missionary or something like that. But you know, they compare how good they have it here in Canada. You know, they don't know what or how other countries live right? How poor countries or other children, you know, they have no food, they never learned to appreciate that. It's my desire or dream to**



**do it, you know just to go maybe for six months or something like this, in another country, or a poor country and they can see the difference”– T**

T explains that her dream for her children is that they are exposed to other countries, specifically other poor countries so that they appreciate the privileges they have. However, T does not directly refer or discuss any of the white privileges that her and her children may have. Instead, she refers to privileges such as wealth and food security in this context. Rather than teaching her children about the ways in which travel can be white-washed and do little to change the white privileges they have, she focuses on the idea of missionary work. T demonstrates both white savourism, and the idea of developers and to-be-developed. Hall and Tucker (2004) point out that a lot of tourism or travel is constituted around the relationship between developed and to-be-developed. The common direction of this relationship being that individuals from “developed” countries travel to other countries that are “to-be-developed” in order to observe the “other”. The authors also explain that much of this travel is shaped by the “developers’ knowledge and categories” rather than learning from individuals that are indigenous to the land (Hall and Tucker, 2004). Similarly, the idea of missionary work is to travel to poorer countries and provide them with religious enlightenment. More specifically, it reflects the idea that white people are there to save individuals in poor countries, these commonly referring to places such as Africa and South America. It assumes that individuals in these places require saving from the current state of their lives. This is a very white and colonial perspective on traveling and does little to teach children, especially white children, about issues of privilege and whiteness. The contact they may have in this type of travel may actually reinforce existing privileges, positional superiority and white blindness. When it comes to contact through travel it is essential to critically analyze who is travelling and for what purpose. While these white parents’ intention is to broaden their children’s

worldview and perspectives, their ideas of contact through travel are in several ways problematic and limited. While traveling can be beneficial for learning about other cultures, parents also need to recognize and address the ways in which their traveling and consumption of the “other” may be white-washed and framed by colonial histories. This type of contact is limited in the impact it may have on changing racial attitudes and encouraging racial equality without acknowledging power relations.

### **Children’s Perspective on Contact and Difference**

While the themes noted in the parent interviews were not directly translated into the children interviews, ideas of contact and interacting with diversity did emerge. The children in this study did not directly use terms such as contact or intergroup contact, however, they did tell stories about events and topics more related to the lives of children. This included stories about what they are learning at school and about hanging out with their friends. When children told stories that contained discussions of contact they common referred to three areas: the media, books, and their peers. Several children noted that they were exposed to racially different perspectives from movies and books that they have read. This included books on racialized characters experiencing discrimination or characters demonstrating different cultures than the children were familiar with. Furthermore, when asked what their friend or peer group was like most children noted that they were in contact with another child of a different race or ethnicity. In one interview with two white girls, Girl A (9 years old) and Girl M (8 years old) commented on their diverse friend group:

**Mel: Okay... do you ever talk to your friends about how you're similar or different?**

**Girl A: Not really, we don't really think that matters.**

**Mel: So what kind of things do you talk about between your friends?**

**Girl A: Like we talk about recent things that happened to us over the weekend.**

**Girl M: Same with me!**

**Girl A: And tomorrow is Holly's birthday party!**

As Girl A and Girl M explain, while they may have contact with children from other races they do not believe these differences matter and more specifically, the things they talk about with their friends do not generally focus on race. As Vincent (2008) explains, contact in some cases can be context for meaningful interactions, these interactions would require conscious and deliberate efforts to learn about the other group. For these children, race is not seen as something that impacts them and their lives. As a result, their conversations and interactions with other races and ethnicities do not lead to meaningful discussions or confrontations about issues such as whiteness and privilege. In another interview with two white girls they noted other challenges in discussing racial difference with their peers and friends:

**Mel: Did you talk about it with your friends or did you feel like maybe you shouldn't?**

**Banana: I felt kinda awkward about it but -**

**Bubble tea: - I kinda felt like if my friends brought it up, then I would talk about it with them but none of them have ever brought it up so.**

Banana (8 years old) and Bubble tea (11 years old) point out that while they are surrounded by difference and diversity these discussions are difficult to bring up and engage in with their friends as they may be “awkward”. They have contact with both varying races and ethnicities in their peer group but these discussions of challenging and critiquing issues of race is not something that is conventional or part of the norm in these children’s lives. This making it difficult to engage in critical and meaningful discussions that would make contact beneficial for them.

There were some cases in which children noted talking about difference with their friends, however, this difference was primarily a cultural one in which they noted differing traditions their families had. When asking Yak (8 years old) if she and her friends ever talked about how they are different from each other she explains:

**Yak: Yeah, we do! So we sometimes talk about what our different families do.**

**Mel: Yeah? What are some examples? Like what do you do differently?**

**Yak: Well, they put ... they have candles on their Christmas tree and we don't!**

**Mel: What do you put on your tree?**

**Yak: Just Christmas ornaments!**

**Mel: Oh yeah! Do your parents ever encourage you to hang out with kids that are different than you?**

**Yak: \*nods yes\***

Similar to other children, Yak discusses her contact with different cultural traditions and ethnicities. Several of the children noted events such as heritage days at their school or learning about different holidays celebrated by different cultures. These children mentioned the various ways in which they have come in contact with different traditions, however, these conversations were never in the context of race or different racial experiences. None of the children discussed the ways they have had contact with different races and the discussions that would have come out of that.

While a common theme in the parent interviews was the idea of contact as normalizing difference this rarely came up in the children's interviews. Only one racialized girl stated something to that extent:

**“I think...if you're not that exposed to it from a young age then I think as you grow up and if you're like 50 the first time you see someone that isn't white then it might be like weird and it might come off as just like strange. So I think lack of racial diversity in schools leads to a belief that different skin colours are weird and not normal. Like we're scared of spiders cause we don't know them, we don't see them that often, like whoa that's scary so kind of like that. But I mean, honestly we're not animals!” – Peyton**

Peyton (12 years old) talks about the diversity in schools and argues for the importance of contact with other races, especially to normalize diversity. More specifically Peyton touches on important issues such as the perceived threat of racialized minorities and the way in which they are marginalized as the “other”. She explains that racialized people are “not animals” and that contact between races is needed so that when white people see a racialized person there is no shock factor but rather deemed as normal. In addition, while she argues for the benefit of contact in

normalizing difference she also goes on to discuss essential issues such as institutional racism and whiteness. However, she does not seem to connect the two concepts and whether contact is effective in addressing these larger issues of race and racism.

In comparison to the parent interviews, the children did not promote or encourage the idea of contact. Instead they discussed the ways in which they personally experienced contact with diversity and difference. However, this contact was primarily in the context of culture and ethnicity rather than specifically focusing on race. Furthermore, when they did talk about contact with different race and ethnicities they did not mention the presence of meaningful conversations that would work to challenge notions of race and white superiority. Rather, the children talked about things they deemed as relevant to their lives including topics such as what they did over the weekend or how they celebrate the holidays.

## **Conclusion**

Previous research can make the idea of contact sound compelling for addressing issues of racism, however, as some scholars note, contact is not enough. As the parents in this research demonstrate, the ways in which white and racialized parents understand and feel about contact differs significantly. While white parents encouraged and promoted the idea of contact with other racialized individuals, racialized parents argued that with contact comes other issues such as concerns regarding identity formation and preparation for racism. Contact theory argues that positive contact between groups of people will contribute to more acceptance and tolerance of varying races and ethnicities. However, what contact theory assumes is that both races want and desire contact with the other. The idea of acceptance and tolerance articulates that someone has the power in which to accept and tolerate the other. In a racialized society like Canada, this means that contact between races and ethnicities is also tied to discussions of white privilege and white

superiority. While white parents' intentions were to address issues of racism they cannot transcend the white dominant structure in which they live. The underlying white privilege that these families have prevents them from understanding and experiencing contact from the perspective of racialized families. White families may point out and be aware of certain types of white privileges that they have, however, there are other, deeper privileges that may not be as prominent and noticeable. These are the privileges that sustain unequal power structures such as racialized institutions and structures. While some parents argue for the benefits and effectiveness of contact in teaching their children about issues of race and ethnicity, it is essential to recognize and address the differing experiences and perspectives that white and racialized families have when it comes to contact. As well as, how these differing daily experiences with contact and race impact how their children are learning about racism in Canada. |

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the various ways in which Canadian parents engage in the racial socialization process with their children during a time in which racial discourses were heightened over the last year. There are several key findings that came out of this study. Contrary to previous research, most white and racialized families in this study did not deny the existence of racial discrimination and inequality in Canada. Many parents actually had scathing critiques of Canada's multiculturalism policy. Critiques included comments on the policy not being effective in addressing racial inequality and contributing to a "silent" racism in Canada. In comparison, almost all racialized parents focused on preparing their children for potential discrimination and racism that they may experience. However, they also aimed to teach their children to respect all religions, races and ethnicities. Most white parents also wanted their children to recognize that they lived in a racially unjust society and yet, the strategies the white parents adopted were aligned with making their children aware of cultural differences and to respect these differences rather than taking any active steps to dislodge whiteness or divest from whiteness. However, one white family stood as the exception to that statement as the mother explained the many ways in which she tries to disinvest from whiteness and teach her white children about race. Regardless of the parents' views on multiculturalism and race most children in the study, both white and of color, espoused colorblind ideologies about race and were colormute, except a pair of white twin girls whose parents put the most labor in talking to their children about racial injustices and actively divested from whiteness.

The findings point at a key theoretical insight on racial socialization in Canada. With limited research looking at racial socialization in the Canadian context, this study fills a gap and expands both scholars' and families' understanding on how certain practices and race talk may

contribute to or challenge existing structures of inequality in Canada. Furthermore, it demonstrates some of the significant differences between the American and Canadian context, specifically addressing the ways in which Canada's multiculturalism policy influences family race talk and penetrates children's racial consciousness. The results from this study not only look at the parent's racial socialization practices but also how those teachings translated in a colour-blind racial ideology in their children.

### **Parents and Race Talk**

While there are various studies that demonstrate the ways in which colour-blind ideology is evident in today's society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), the parents in this study all acknowledged and called out various examples of racism in Canadian society. Both white and racialized parents did this to varying degrees and criticality, depending on several social positions they inhabited such as race, occupation, and in some cases gender. The parent's and children's interviews demonstrated the importance of considering social context and ideology when analyzing racial socialization practices. In addition, the interviews also made evident the key role that parents play in passing down ideas about race and racism in Canada that are internalized by their children.

Different social contexts and locations also impacted the strength of the multiculturalism rhetoric in racial socialization practices and teachings. Non-academic immigrant families seemed to commonly refer to multiculturalism and teach it to their children in the form of respecting different cultures and promoting diversity. While these parents still discussed the presence of racism in Canada, they mentioned that they personally have never experienced it. By identifying "ethnic symbols" around them and their kids it gave the impression that everyone was equal. This ultimately translated into a colour-blind understanding of race for the children in which they noticed the diversity in their schools and extra-curricular activities, and believed that meant



everyone had similar opportunities as them. For these non-academic immigrant families the way in which they were dealing with issues of race in Canada is by distancing themselves from racialization and racism. By only including discourses of Canada being a benevolent country in which immigrants can “make it” it reinforces the myth of multiculturalism and cuts out critical discussions on race and racism.

Generally, white parents also discussed and taught their children about multiculturalism, including other forms of diversity such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. White parents frequently commented on the fact that they do not spend as much time discussing race as they do on other social inequalities that they view as being more relevant to their children’s lives. They noted that issues of gender and sexuality may be more central in their teachings rather than issues of race and racism. Furthermore, while they focused on other inequalities and attempted to teach their children about race, these parents did not mention or include discussions of intersectionality. Rather, white families decentered race from intersectionality by focusing on other issues and not tying them to race. This is a stark comparison to the ways in which racialized families taught their children about race and racism. Racialized parents noted the criticalness of racial socialization and that these teachings were essential for their children’s survival and safety.

This same divide is seen when looking at the ways in which white and racialized parents talked about other racial issues like institutional racism, contact theory and racial tourism. White parents demonstrated a textbook understanding of institutional racism in which they did not commonly interrogate their own whiteness and the ways in which it would impact both their teachings of race and the way their children would understand or experience these issues. Furthermore, white parents frequently expressed the opinion that since their children were immersed in diversity this meant that they were learning about race and ethnicity simply through

contact with other groups of people. White mothers were unique in this regard as they also pushed for their children to travel to foreign places in order to learn about race and cultural difference. While contact and racial tourism were encouraged by white families, children's contact with other races and ethnicities was rarely supplemented with critical teachings of important racial issues.

On the other hand, racialized families taught their children about these issues from a place of "feeling race" and their daily lived experiences of racism. When teaching their children about institutional racism their focus was on mitigating the perception of their racialized children in certain social situations, ensuring safe spaces for their children, and looking at ways in which to dismantle structures of inequality. This social justice rhetoric is one that was unique to the racialized families in this study. In addition, while racialized parents also mentioned contact as being beneficial for their children's development of race and racism, they also engaged in other racial socialization practices to ensure their children understood deeper issues of racial discrimination and differential treatment. Racialized parents were consistently and constantly engaging with their children to make sure they were racial conscious as well as working towards dismantling racial inequality in their communities and society.

### **Children and Race Talk**

What is interesting is that while none of the parents demonstrated a colour-blind ideology, this was a very common ideology among their children. The children of both white and racialized parents frequently noted that they did not believe race mattered in Canadian society and that race would not be an issue that impacted anyone's life chances or opportunities. However, there were a few exceptions to this. There were a few racialized children who did articulate the importance of race in a racialized society and the ways in which they understood key issues like institutional racism, microaggressions, and stereotyping. Surprisingly, in one white family the children were

quite racially aware and discussed the various ways in which their mom taught them about issues of race. This white mother stood out as she worked to consistently, continuously, and constantly engage with her white children about race and racism in Canada. However, in general the children in this study noted that they believed everyone should be treated equally and that race did not matter to them personally. When pushed to discuss race further some of the children would explain that they were aware that some people would experience differential treatment based on their race. Although, this was usually discussed as a bi-racial issue only involving Blacks and whites. Lastly, in the context of Canada, the multicultural ideology that children were learning from both their parents and their schools may dominate and even trump other racial socialization teachings that children were receiving. Rather than critically engaging with issues of institutional racism and white supremacy in Canada, children's lessons on race seemed to be primarily focused on respecting racial and ethnic differences in the country. The strong rhetoric of multiculturalism over other racial issues may explain why the majority of children in this study demonstrated a colour-blind ideology.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study presented significant results that shed light on what racial socialization looks like in the Canadian context, however, there were several limitations to the study. While this study included a diverse composition of different races and ethnicities, not all races and ethnicities were represented. One key group that was not represented in the interviews are Indigenous people. While the study did include one mixed-race family that included Indigenous members, none of the Indigenous family members wished to be interviewed. Indigenous people are a large part of the racial and ethnic landscape and dynamic in Canada. More specifically, central to Canadian race relations include Indigenous groups and the racism that they have experienced throughout history

and still currently do in the country. Indigenous families are in a unique and challenging position when it comes to teaching their children about race due to historical and ongoing acts of racism including residential schools, the 60s scoop, and lack of access to social mobility. All of these inevitably impact what Indigenous parents teach their children in regards to their culture and traditions.

In addition to the lack of Indigenous experiences and perspectives, this study also presented some limitations in regards to the children and interviewing them. While there was a good number of children that were interviewed, there were several children that chose not to be interviewed. This made it a little difficult to draw lines between specific racial teaching practices that the parents used and the ways in which they translated in children's racial ideologies and consciousness. In cases where children did not want to be interviewed their parents mentioned that their children were anxious or scared of talking to a stranger during the interview. Furthermore, due to COVID precautions and restrictions all interviews were done online which meant that the children never met or interacted with the interviewer prior to asking them if they wanted to be interviewed. Had I been able to meet with the families and interact with the parents and children, the children may have felt more comfortable being interviewed by me. Online interviews presented their own challenges including technological difficulties, unstable connections, and not being able to properly build rapport with the participating families before their interviews.

### **Towards an Anti-Racist Future**

This thesis testifies to the ways in which the lived experiences of everyday racism and institutional racism are essential when trying to understand the ways in which parents process how race stratifies Canadian society. Furthermore, the significance of understanding the ways in which these racial ideologies are passed down to the next generation, subsequently shaping their

children's racial consciousness as adults. There are numerous studies which analyze the ways in which American families engage in the racial socialization process, however, there are limited ones looking at the Canadian context. Due to differing racial dynamics and landscapes of the countries it is important to also look at the racial socialization process in Canada. Imperative to the Canadian context is understanding the way in which multiculturalism may impact or influence how and what parents teach their children about race and racism. With little research analyzing the ways in which both white and racialized families engage in the racial socialization process, this research helps to fill a gap in Canadian race literature. While this research is significant in the academic realm in helping scholars better understand how families' racial teachings and learning differs in Canada and how it may work to reinforce and maintain race relations in the country, this research is also of significant relevance to Canadian families, especially white families.

Parents take on a number of roles when it comes to their children, including making sure that they are developing, fostering and assessing their children's skills, and knowledge. For some families this primarily starts from race, while for others race is an issue that they eventually get to. As demonstrated in this study, white and racialized parents do this in various ways depending on their lived experiences and interactions with race, which ultimately translated into differing understandings of race for their children. For Canadian families, teaching their children about race may prove to be exceptionally difficult as essential conversations on race are drowned out by a strong rhetoric of multiculturalism. By missing out on these essential conversations children may be internalizing several key lessons. First, that race is not a significant issue impacting inequality in Canada and not one that merits critical engagement with. Second, equality is characterized by the amount of "ethnic symbols" surrounding them. And lastly, they may not have the knowledge and awareness to identify or address racism when it does happen. While these children may not

grow up into adulthood completely colour-blind, as they are likely to learn more about race and racism in older ages as well as from other institutions, race may still not be the key framework from which they understand stratification in society.

The significance of this is that parents play a key role in developing children's initial and basic comprehension of race in Canada. While their children may learn about these issues in some form from other institutions, parents are in a critical position to teach their children about race. Understandings of the racial socialization process in Canada is beneficial for both scholars and Canadian families as they demonstrate the ways in which teachings of race may fall short in Canadian families and where additional teachings and engagement may be needed in order to properly educate the next generation. By critically engaging with race and ensuring that children's racial consciousness and ideology works to promote racial equality it is a step toward dismantling and disrupting the persistence of racism in Canada. Here, I offer several suggestions for ways in which parents can center race in their discussions and teachings and work towards raising anti-racist children in a racialized society like Canada.

Parents who are concerned with protecting their children from racism are the ones who understand race viscerally. In order to raise anti-racist children, this would mean constant, continued and critical engagement with race and not when racial injustices are on the news or waiting for the right moment for this. Moral development scholar Richard Weissbourd (2009) argues that if white, privileged parents are to raise morally conscious children, they need to engage with them from an early age about issues that make our society unequal – and in white dominant society, race becomes one of the key frameworks of stratification. White parents in this study demonstrated the various ways in which they de-center conversations of race in intersectional issues. Race in a racialized society should be a central issue that white parents are engaging with

early in their children's lives and on a consistent and constant rate. Racialized families pointed out that they taught their children about race at very early ages as this is not an issue that they can avoid. White parents similarly should work towards teaching their children early so that they do not go on to believe that race is an issue that evades them or is an issue that periodically comes up.

Secondly, parents and other family members that children look up to should frequently and commonly be critical of their own race talk. As Myers (2005) explains, scrutinizing your own race talk involves being educated about the roots and implications of the race talk that one uses. Furthermore, other researchers like Hagerman (2018) point out that a starting point for white families is asking self-reflexive questions and being honest with all the ways in which they experience privilege and reproduce racism. Another suggestion that Myers makes that I believe also goes hand in hand with unlearning and relearning ones race talk includes her discussion on political correctness. Myers (2005) explains that during desegregation exceptional Blacks helped change racial etiquette from overt race talk to fostering more political correctness. This movement helped to educate privileged whites on the power of language and to be respectful of people's differences (Myers, 2005). One issue with political correctness may be that individuals fear making a mistake and offending groups of people. However, I argue that parents, as well as children, should strive to be educated and continuously learn. Making mistakes is a normal part of life, however, parents should engage with children to learn about different groups of people and understand the significance of language in maintaining racism. Children witnessing parents, especially white parents, making mistakes or unlearning internalized biases encourages them to not only strive to also be educated but also learn how to address their own mistakes and biases. Rather than defending or choosing to be ignorant, children may learn from example and work towards rectifying and unlearning certain racial understandings to be closer to anti-racist.

Lastly, it is often said that raising children takes a village. Several racialized parents in this study noted that they called on white parents to equally put in the effort in dismantling racism. Racialized families cannot be doing all of the anti-racism work. As some of the racialized parents pointed out, their children and white children cannot be learning about race from a singular unit. They should be learning about it from multiple individuals in their lives and communities so that it does not feel like a one off event. Hagerman's (2018) suggestion also fits in here as she argues that parents should be working towards raising "good citizens". Rather than working to increase resources and opportunities for their own children, white parents can challenge the persistence of racism if they are willing to give up some of their own power and privilege (Hagerman, 2018). Hagerman explains that "placing value on children collectively rather than individually is the most important way white parents can challenge ideologies of parenting that are deeply entwined with the legacy of white supremacy" (2018, p. 209). Parents should work towards not only encouraging the happiness, well-being and success of their own children, but all children in their communities. However, for some white parents the struggle with this may be that they do not know where to start. I believe that as part of a community, white families have a lot to learn from other racialized families. Every family in this study encouraged contact with individuals from other races and cultures, but rarely did the white parents mention the deeper and more meaningful contact that their white family could have with racialized families that does not result in the othering of racialized families even inadvertently. White parents are able to set an example for their children by having those critical conversations with racialized parents in which they ask questions like *what can I do as a white parent to promote a more racially equal society in which your racialized child can have just as many opportunities and success as my child?* White families should attempt to learn from the experiences of racialized families through studies like this one and be changed by



those experiences of learning. It is on white parents to create communities of active and continued anti-racists practices and engagement so that the work of racial learning becomes anti-racist at its core to eventually move towards a more racially just society.

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**APPENDIX:**

**Appendix A: Participant Demographic Chart**

<b>White Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender-Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender)</b>
	Bob (F- White)	Stay at home mother	No	Bubble tea (11 –F) Banana (8 – F)
	Constance (F - White)	Professor	No	
	Tee (F – Russian/German)	Nurse	Yes	Girl A (9 – F) Girl M (8 – F)
	Sam (M - American) Sarah (F - American)	Professor and stay at home mother	Yes	
	Gus (F - White)	Professor	No	Bob (12 – M)
	Anne (F- White)	Professor	No	
	Charlotte (F- White/Dutch)	Stay at home mom and spouse is a carpenter/farmer	No	Ezra (11 – F) Naegi (11 – F)
<b>Racialized Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender-Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender)</b>
	Singh (F - Fijian) Singh (M - Fijian)	Engineer and Administrative Clerk	Yes	
	Mad Fish (M - Filipino) Pretty Fish (F - Filipino)	Engineer and Health Care Aide	Yes	Sister Fish (11 – F) Baby Fish (8 – M)
	Nancy (F - Mexican)	Teacher	Yes	Peyton (12 – F)
	Blen (F – Ethiopian/Black)	Project Coordinator	Yes	
<b>Mixed-Race Families</b>	<b>Parents (Gender – Race)</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	<b>Children (Age – Gender - Race)</b>
	Kristine (F-White)	Social Worker	No	
	Tristen (M-White) Anne (F-Chinese-Canadian)	University Librarian and stay at home mother	No	Yak (9 – F – Racialized)

	Marissa (F-Middle Eastern) David (M-Indian)	Contractor and stay at home mother	Yes	Taylor (8 – M – Racialized)
	Violent (F-White)	Retired Police Officer	No	Amanda (10 – F - Racialized)
	Roberta (F-Iranian)	Professor	Yes	
	Joyce (F-Filipino)	Administrative Clerk	Yes	Batman (8 – M – Racialized)
	Manu (M-Canadian/Indian)	Student	No	

## Appendix B: Parent's Interview Guide

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
  - a. How old are your children?
  - b. What racial or ethnic group do you all identify as?
2. What do you both do for work?
3. Has your family ever lived outside of Canada?
4. In Canada we hear the term multiculturalism a lot. When did you first hear this term?  
What does the term multiculturalism mean to you? Has the meaning of this term changed for you since you first heard it?
5. How do you think it is practiced in Canada? Are your children/child learning about multiculturalism in school? What are they being taught about it? Do they talk about or questions about that with you at home? Sometimes kids ask the hardest questions. How easy or hard is it to answer their questions about multiculturalism and why?
6. What does the term race mean to you?
7. How do you think your children understand their own race? How do you know this?

8. And people who are not their race?
9. What kind of things are your kids learning in school right now?
  - a. Orange shirt day?
  - b. Do you feel like you have to supplement any of the things their learning?
10. What is the racial make-up of your children's friends? School friends or neighborhood friends?
  - a. How often do your children get to hang out with children that look different than them? How important do you think that is for them as they are growing up?
  - b. How does your children relate to kids at the school who may be a different race? Do they talk about that with you ever? What do they usually say?
11. How do you think your children's school or extracurricular activities influence the ways in which they understand race?
12. How would you describe the neighborhood your family lives in?
13. Why did you choose that area?/What made you want to raise your children there?
14. In your opinion does racial inequalities exist in Canada? If they say yes, how do they show up think? Can you give me some examples? If they say no, then ask so do you think in Canada have been able to move beyond racial differences of all kinds? Why do you think so?
15. What do you think of these protests? Are they important for our society to change?
  - a. Have seen these protests in Calgary/Edmonton? Were you able to go? Did you go alone, or did you go as family (I know with the pandemic its hard)?
  - b. Why or why not?

16. Can you recall and describe a time your child has come to you with a question regarding race or an experience with racism/discrimination?
17. Has your child ever brought home a question regarding race or racism that you couldn't answer or surprised you?
18. Have you even experienced something like that with your children and how do you handle it?
19. How important do you think it is to talk to your child about race and racism?
  - a. Why do you believe it to be that important?
20. How often would you say you discuss issues of inequality with your children?
  - a. If not often or none at all, why is that?
21. How do you communicate issues of racism with your children? Can you give some concrete examples?
22. Are there any things you feel you have to warn your children about due to their race or ethnicity?
  - a. Do you as a family ever experience racialization or stereotyping?
  - b. Have your kids ever been stereotyped? How did you address it?
  - c. Do you talk to other parents about this?
23. Do you feel as though you have to make your children aware of any potential discrimination they or other groups may face in society?
  - a. In what ways do you communicate this to your children?
24. Do you discuss other racial groups with your children or in front of your children?
  - a. In what ways do you?

25. Can you reflect on a time when your kids have said something about race that you felt they shouldn't have?
26. What is the most difficult conversation you've had about race with your children – what has been the easiest? OR Do you anticipate having to have any difficult conversations with your child regarding race or racism?
27. Where do you feel your children learns the most about race and racism in Canada?
  - a. Why do you believe \_\_\_\_ over school/media/family/etc?
28. How comfortable are you with your children learning about race and racism from sources such as schools or the media?
29. Are your kids dressing up for Halloween this year?
  - a. What have they dressed up as in previous years?
  - b. Is there anything you do not let them dress up as?
30. Do you have any questions for me?

## **Appendix C: Children's Interview Guide**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDREN:**

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1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. Can you tell me a little about your family?
  - a. What kind of things do you do together?
4. What are some of your favourite things to do?
5. What kind of things are you learning in school right now?
  - a. Have learned anything about the history of Canada?

- b. Did your school have an orange shirt day? What did you learn?
  - c. Did your parents talk to you about orange shirt day and what it means?
6. Can you draw me a house that you think a rich person would live in? And a house that a poor person would live in?
- a. What kind of person do you think would live in this house? What do they look like? Where do they live?
  - b. Do you think that a black or brown person has the same chance of living in the rich house as a white person?
7. Who is your best friend at school?
- a. Do they look like you or different than you?
  - b. Do you have a friend that is a different skin colour than you?
  - c. Do you and your friends ever talk about how you're different from each other?  
Different cultures or traditions?
8. Do your parents encourage you to hang out with children that are different than you?
9. Celebrity exercise: show pictures of celebrities
- a. Can you identify any of these celebrities?
  - b. Can you identify their race?
  - c. What kind of things or characteristics are you looking for when you decide what their race is?
  - d. How did you learn this to be true?
10. When I was younger, close to your age, I would go bike riding with my friends a lot and so I'd spend a lot of time in the sun. I remember after one trip I met up with my friend Jackie who has darker skin than me, and I would compare my tan to her and say that I



was almost as dark as her. Can you tell me a story of a time that maybe someone's skin colour came up in a conversation you were having with your friends or family? OR a story about a time that maybe you thought it wasn't right to talk about someone's skin colour?

11. Do you think it is okay to talk about the colour of someone's skin? Why or why not?

12. Have you ever had a discussion/conversation with your parents about your race or culture?

a. How did that conversation go – like how did it start? What did they tell you?

What questions did you have for them?

b. What did you learn from that conversation that you did not know before?

If they say no, ask them if they would like to have such a discussion with their parents?

13. Have you seen or heard about the BLM protests going on? Have your parents talked to you about it?

14. Do you think the colour of a person's skin matters?

a. In what ways does it matter?

15. Do you think that all groups of people are treated the same?

16. You know there are people in the world who are so poor they can't even eat full meals and then sometimes because someone is black they are told they are not good enough or not smart. Have you ever discussed such issues with your parents? Like, how we have enough food to eat and other people may not or we have a house to live and some people have to sleep on the streets or we don't get judged as bad because of how we look or what color our skin is but other people do? How often do you have these discussions with

your parents? Who talks to you about these more, mom, dad, older siblings? How often do you think your parents talk to you about race, inequality, and privilege?

17. Can you tell me a story of a time when you saw or heard of someone being treated differently because of the colour of their skin?
18. If tomorrow an alien came and changed the color of your skin to black/brown/white, how do you think your life would be different/change? OR Let's say you and [friend of different race] switched places for a day, do you think anything about your life would be different?
19. What kind of things do you like to do outside of school?
  - a. Do you feel like you fit in with the other kids in those spaces?
20. What are some of your favourites TV shows and movies?
  - a. What do the characters in those shows/movies look like?
21. **Heroes and Villains exercise:**
  - a. What do you notice about these characters?
  - b. Can anyone be a hero? Do heroes normally look like this?
  - c. Do you see a lot of heroes that look like you on TV?
  - d. Do heroes normally all look the same?
    - i. What about them is the same or different?
22. Are you and your friends excited for Halloween? Do you dress up for Halloween?
  - a. What are you going as this year? What have you gone as last year?
  - b. Is there any costumes that you think are bad to wear?
23. What was your favourite part of this interview?
24. Do you have any questions for me?