NAVIGATING RACISM AND RESILIENCE: AN INTERPRETIVE DESCRIPTION
STUDY OF ETHNORACIAL MINORITY YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN VANCOUVER

by

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the persistent racial discrimination faced by minority youth in Canada despite the country’s reputation for multiculturalism and inclusivity. The issue has become increasingly pressing as immigration rates continue to rise. The current research aims to explore how young people from ethnoracial minority groups navigate racism and resilience in their daily lives within the Canadian multiculturalism context, using the Interpretive Description methodology. The study investigates the factors that contribute to or hinder resilience, identifies racism-related risks in unique contexts and circumstances, and examines how youth cope with challenges in the context of sociopolitical impacts. The study uses a resilience framework, acknowledging its potential while recognizing the need to examine the concept of resilience critically for it to better serve marginalized communities. Grounded in critical theory and a social justice perspective, this research highlights the significance of centering lived experiences and recognizing power dynamics in the fight against racism. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data generated through focus groups and individual interviews with 18 young people in Vancouver from ethnoracial minority groups who had self-identified as experienced racism. The study concludes that subtle and overt forms of everyday racism continue to dominate, and systemic racism is often hidden under the Canadian multiculturalism ideology. Youth have developed creative ways to respond to racism. In general, resilient responses for youth meant taking sole responsibility for diffusing racist encounters or relying on internal resources to reduce the negative impact of racism. Participants felt that their communities (e.g., neighbourhood, school) were limited in supporting them against systemic racism. The findings have theoretical implications for dominant resilience theory and suggest a need for a new conceptualization of the construct. These research findings, situated within the broader literature,
likewise offer practice recommendations for professionals working with youth, including educators, healthcare professionals, social workers, clinicians, and policymakers.
Lay Summary

The study examined how 18 young people (aged 16-24) managed racism in Vancouver. Using a critical theory of resilience informed by the social justice approach, the research emphasizes the significance of studying lived experiences. The data from focus groups and individual interviews were interpreted, identifying shared themes about vulnerability and resilience in the context of racism. Findings suggest that: 1) subtle and overt forms of everyday racism still exist, often hidden beneath Canada’s multicultural exterior; 2) participants felt that their communities were not capable of supporting them against systemic racism and frequently remained silent in the presence of racist encounters; 3) young people developed creative strategies to effectively respond to racism, such as taking sole responsibility for diffusing racist tension or relying on internal resources to mitigate its impact. The study provides practical recommendations for professionals working with racialized youth, including social workers, educators, healthcare workers and policymakers.
Preface

This dissertation is based on original, independent research by the author, Neringa Dainaraviciute. Please note that the former work of Dainaraviciute is under a different last name, Kubiliene.

A version of chapter 4 and chapter 5 has been published.

I conducted data generation, analysis, and manuscript composition in the paper above. Dr. Yan contributed to the methodology section and to manuscript edits. Dr. Kumsa contributed to manuscript edits. Burman contributed to data collection.

Ethical approval for this research study was obtained from the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate number for the study entitled *Resilience when racism is experienced* is H18-03485.
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Dedication

To the most important people in my life

My daughter Greta Kubiliute and my son Jonas Baltakis

You have walked every step of this journey with me

I am forever indebted to you
Chapter 1: Introduction

This study uses interpretive description, an applied qualitative methodology, to explore how resilience is experienced among ethnoracial minority youth who encountered racial discrimination in Canada. To understand their resilience processes, I will present how youth negotiate their everyday life managing racial discrimination to maintain well-being and how their environments support them. In this chapter, I will provide the background context, the scope of my study, its significance, and the structure of my dissertation.

1.1 Background

Canada prides itself on being one of the most diverse populations in the world. It is often held up as an example of how multiple cultural groups can thrive harmoniously together (Fleras, 2019; Kymlicka, 2010). Multiculturalism is a prominent feature of Canadian society, with immigrants comprising 23% and ethnoracial groups comprising 26% of the population nationwide (Statistics Canada Census, 2022). Of all ethnoracial minorities living in Canada, the largest populations reside in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

Canada’s race and ethnic relations have been regulated and defined by the Multiculturalism Act, aiming to promote the inclusiveness of immigrants and different cultures and mutual respect among people from different backgrounds living in the same country. According to Fleras (2019), “Official multiculturalism reflects, reinforces, and advances Canada’s status as an immigration society” (p. 25). Multiculturalism refers to a series of government policies in efforts to accommodate cultural diversity, preserve social order, and manage social change (Fleras, 2019). The policy of multiculturalism has its roots in the 1970s when Canada experienced a rise

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1 In Statistics Canada ethnoracial groups are called “visible minorities”. In this work, I will use “ethnoracial” minorities. Tensions in the terminology and the conflated use of terms will be discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.
in immigration, particularly from non-European countries (Statistics Canada, 2005). Historically, multiculturalism was established as a responsive policy to “different challenges” that large numbers of newcomers “with a wide range of histories and experiences” face (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 7). It was also a response to previously failed attempts to assimilate immigrants, which led to increased racism and prejudice from dominant populations against newcomers (Rattansi, 2011, p. 10). Thus, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was officially passed in 1985. Based on the pluralistic ideological belief that every culture is equally valuable, this act sought to provide a platform for immigrants to integrate into Canada as their host society without the demands of losing their home cultural identity (Park et al., 2020; Rattansi, 2011).

Despite these multiculturalism policies and commitments to diversity and inclusion, evidence shows that many people from visible minority groups in Canada are affected by racism. To examine the contributing factors to racism in Canada, it is crucial to understand how multiculturalism as a framework promotes diverse identities, regulates immigration and ethnic and race relations in Canada, and how the social interventions established under multicultural policies respond to racism.

1.1.1 Racism in Canada

Racism operates through racial discrimination when individuals or groups are treated unfairly based on prejudices of their belonging to the presumed ethnoracial groups (Haeny et al., 2021; Li, 2007). Racism is an “ideology, structure and process in which inequalities inherent in the wider social structure are related to biological and cultural factors attributed to those who are seen as a different ‘race’ and ‘ethnic’ group” (Essed, 2002, p. 185).

Although Canada has implemented multicultural policies and programs, racial inequality persists, and evidence reveals how racialized groups face limited opportunities for equal
participation in this multicultural society. According to Tator and Henry (2010), a dominant ideology in Canada is *democratic racism*, characterized by the conflict between one's commitment to the values of a democratic society, such as justice and equality, while maintaining negative attitudes towards racialized people, resulting in their unfair treatment (p. 3). Therefore, many have mentioned that today’s racism is often subtle and less obvious (Cénat, Hajizadeh, et al., 2022), sometimes only expressed through microaggressions (Houshmand et al., 2014a; Zhao et al., 2022) or as a “coded language” (Li, 2007, p. 37). Dei (2006) highlights the prevalence of racism in Canada:

Racism is power. It is institutional, systemic, and cultural. In fact, racism as a system, in which one group exercises power over another on the basis of real, perceived, or imagined physical and cultural differences, has had numerous and persistent effects in Canadian history (p. 97).

For instance, in Du Mont and Forte’s (2016) study, 15.3% of all Canadians reported experiencing discrimination in the past five years. Among the most prevalent types of discrimination reported in their sample, discrimination based on culture/ethnicity or race/colour was significantly associated with poor self-rated health. Specifically, the results indicate that 5.4% of Canadians experienced discrimination based on ethnicity or culture and 5.1% based on race or colour. Statistics Canada (2011), in their reports on Diversity and Inclusion, identified that 24% of all visible minorities in Canada were experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment based on race or skin colour, either alone or in combination with other reasons such as culture, language, accent, or religion. In the Statistics Canada 2022 report, this number increased to half of the visible minority population who reported experiences of discrimination within the previous five years. To break this down by ethnoracial group, this represented 57.6% of all
Black, 54.3% of Chinese, and 47.4% of South Asian individuals. Furthermore, almost half (45.6%) of the visible minority population experienced discrimination at work, with the highest reported being 55.2% among Black individuals, 52.1% South Asians, and 31.2% Chinese individuals (Statistics Canada, 2022). Moreover, from 2014-2022, each year, around 50% of reported hate crimes were motivated by race and ethnicity, and in 2022, this number increased to the highest, 54% of all self-reported hate-related incidents (Statistics Canada, 2023a). It is important to note that racial discrimination against the Chinese Canadian population, the largest visible minority group in Vancouver, increased by 4.4% within a year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2022); with similar results noted in the recent studies on Anti-Asian racism in Canada during the pandemic (see Zhao et al., 2022).

1.1.2 Problem statement and focus of the study

Evidence from existing research reveals that everyday racism poses ongoing challenges to youth. The impact of racial discrimination on the physical and mental health of minority youth has been well documented in numerous studies across Canada and the USA (Islam et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2017; Priest et al., 2013; Trent et al., 2019). Research has consistently shown that the detrimental effects are significant, highlighting the need for intervention and support to address these consequences. For example, findings consistently show that discrimination is linked with increasing symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation, and lower psychological well-being (e.g., Marks et al., 2020). Damaging stereotypes and racial prejudicial perspectives are particularly hurtful to youth during their formative years, as they develop their identities, find their sense of belonging and expand their social circles (e.g., Benner et al., 2018; Chavous et al., 2008; Griffith et al., 2019; Yi et al., 2020; Zhou & Bankston, 2020).
For instance, a significant recent study completed by the Angus Reid Institute (Korzinski, 2021) with Canadian middle and high school students concerning their experiences of racism at schools illustrates the prevalence of racism experienced by Canadian youth and their way of coping. Their study, involving 872 youths aged 12-17 years, showed that more than half of Canadian students reported witnessing incidents with their peers being discriminated against based on race, and 14% of all youth stated they themselves experienced racial discrimination. This survey shows that racism is a significant and ongoing problem in Canadian schools. The effects of racism are long-lasting and can have a profound emotional impact on students who have been targeted. The study also revealed that students who directly faced racism had different perceptions of it compared to those who only observed it. These differences were visible in how students perceived their peers’ reactions and teachers' responses to racialized encounters. For instance, students who have experienced racial discrimination are more likely to report that teachers ignore or are unaware of such encounters. This finding raises concerns about the level of support young people receive in the face of everyday racism and highlights the importance of environmental support (or lack thereof). This issue is central to my dissertation's epistemological commitments, which focus on the lived experiences and perceived meaningful support in the presence of racism.

To date, research on coping with ethnoracial minority youth in Canada is mainly based on data from studies with immigrants (e.g., Francis & Yan, 2016; Islam et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2009). The evidence about risk and vulnerability from these studies illuminates challenges faced by racialized minority youth and highlights their needs and resources. However, the scholarship on racialized youth coping falls short of exploring the nuances of their coping mechanisms in response to experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination. Notably, no studies analyze the
sociopolitical climate's role in their coping responses, specifically, how their environment protects them from racist experiences or reinforces racist acts. Likewise, it is also vital to recognize that young people are active agents in co-constructing their own narratives. As Yan (2016) emphasizes, individuals strategically negotiate their “different aspects of social positions in particular circumstances” (p. 126). Thus, as young people face various forms of racial oppression daily, understanding how they navigate the experiences and respond to challenges in different situations is crucial for effective, socially grounded research. The focus of this study is to interrogate this complex dynamic within lived experiences among racialized youth from the resilience perspective.

1.2 An interdisciplinary issue and resilience framework

Resilience studies in psychology offered a promising theoretical framework to understand the experiences of children and youth who adjust well despite adversities (Cameron et al., 2014; Masten, 2014; Theron et al., 2015; Ungar et al., 2023). There are some studies that investigated resilience in racialized minority youth, but only a few focused directly on racism as an adverse event. Although racial discrimination has been a concern of existing research with immigrant populations, it is usually discussed in the context of other struggles that immigrants face. Moreover, most of this research on resilience and marginalized youth is based in the USA. Research with Canadian individuals who experience racism is very limited. For instance, in Cabrera Martinez et al.’s (2022) review of studies on resilience in the context of racism, only one study was reported focusing on Canadian youth. Similar results were found by Jacob et al.’s (2022) systematic literature review on coping with racism, with only one study from a Canadian sample out of 26 articles in their review. Although there has been some research conducted in the USA and a few studies in Canada exploring how young people cope with racism, with some
investigating the factors that contribute to positive outcomes despite these experiences, there are no analyses of resilience from an anti-racism interdisciplinary perspective. Furthermore, just a few rare qualitative studies have focused explicitly on how resilience is expressed among minority youth in Canada who are dealing with racism, particularly from the perspective of the youth themselves.

For social work, a resilience framework is a significant approach that aligns with the main principles of the discipline, which is to view individuals as possessing an unlimited potential for growth manifesting in their own unique ways (Benard, 2006; Heinonen & Spearman, 2010; Rapp et al., 2005; Saleebey, 2006). Resilience is a critical concept within a strength-based approach that includes constructs such as hope, empowerment and self-determination (Simmons et al., 2016). It is important to note that the concept of resilience in social work considers structural and systemic level analysis and the need to acknowledge the ecological aspects, such as oppression, privilege, and power, as the critical tenets of individuals' resilience process from the social justice perspective (Bottrell, 2009; Park et al., 2020; Ungar, 2004; Van Breda, 2018).

While the theory of resilience has offered a beneficial understanding of how individuals and communities manage adversity, its relevance to racialized groups has been questioned by experts from different fields of study. They have raised significant concerns about the effectiveness and potential drawbacks of using resilience frameworks in this context. These criticisms provide a detailed viewpoint on how resilience could affect people from marginalized communities, highlighting the areas where the conventional approach may not be sufficient and needs to be redefined and reconceptualized (Garrett, 2016; Schwarz, 2018). Both social work and education scholars share concerns about resilience theory’s emphasis on individual responsibility and personal growth, potentially leading to blaming individuals for their struggles and largely
ignoring systemic struggles (O’Brien, 2014; Park et al., 2020; Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016; Zembylas, 2021). Additionally, these disciplines acknowledge the social justice aspect often overlooked in resilience research by ignoring structural inequities and masking structural injustices. These critical investigations suggest that resilience, when applied to understanding the experiences of marginalized populations, must include more nuanced frameworks that go beyond the normative measures of resilience. Additionally, they illuminate the need to include the analysis of power and social, cultural and political systems in the resilience analysis.

For instance, in the recent report on Black Canadians’ work experiences completed by Statistics Canada (2020), the psychological construct of resilience was used as a characteristic of individuals without considering the role of sociopolitical conditions. Among other measures, this report investigated individuals’ “ability to bounce back after hard times”. They found that the Black population “demonstrated strong levels of resilience” (p. 12) as they scored high in three measures: 1) they were able to bounce back quickly after hard times (44% compared to 33% among the rest of the population); 2) they were more likely to appraise hard times as learning experience (65% vs 48%), and 3) they were more likely to return to “normal” life after difficulties (41% vs 32%). Generally, these results indicate that Black Canadians are more resilient than the rest of the population. Given the preponderance of perceived unfair treatment reported by Black Canadians in the same survey, their “resilience” results are concerning. Without contextual details, these study outcomes may perpetuate existing inequalities and injustices. The use of resilience in this report shows how racialized youth may be praised for being or expected to be ‘resilient’. It illuminates the fact that the onus is on the individual to develop the mindset of adaptability and self-reliance. The question remains: What happens to the individuals who do not demonstrate these qualities of “bouncing back” from unjust experience?
With the awareness of these gaps in the literature and the need to reconceptualize the construct of resilience that reflects the lived experiences of marginalized youth, my research will use an interpretive description methodology to uncover nuanced ways that youth seek to thrive and how their environments either support or hinder their resilience. My definition of resilience, as it is applied to racialized youth, refers to the processes in which youth negotiate their identities, immersed in unequal power hierarchies, to maintain their own well-being. My understanding is informed by Ungar’s (2011) socio-ecological and Bottrell’s (2009) social theories of resilience that emphasize the interaction between the individual and their environments while decentering the attention from individual behaviour, to a critical understanding of the capacities of their environments to provide resilient conditions for individuals to thrive. Bottrel (2009) highlights the importance of looking into “the embeddedness of resilience in social inequities, social processes and the differentiated societal and ideological expectations of young people” (p. 321). I view this negotiation as a process in which youth engage in practices that are meaningful to them to exercise their agency so they can reject the characterizations ascribed to them by others in the face of experienced racism.

1.3 Research questions

For this study, I aim to explore the neglected area of research on resilience and coping with racialized encounters. Primarily, as was discussed in the previous section, I intend to analyze how the sociopolitical climate and the active agency of young people influence their responses to racism. The present study is an interpretive description inquiry to gain qualitative insights into youth perspectives and actions in relation to their navigating racism and resilience. The primary research question for this interpretive investigation is: In the context of Canadian
multiculturalism, how do ethnoracial minority youth navigate racism and resilience in their daily lives?

To answer this question, I examine the following lines of inquiry (sub-questions):

- What factors facilitate or hinder resilience for ethnoracial minority youth while they, in the context of experienced racism, navigate experiences in their daily lives?
- From a youth perspective, what specific risks are associated with lived experiences of racism in their specific contexts and circumstances?
- What are the strategies through which youth cope with personal, family, and community challenges that are related to experienced racism, and what culturally meaningful resources do their environments provide to support them?

1.4 **Significance of the study**

It is clear from existing studies that the well-being of young people who experience racial discrimination is a concern for today’s society. In Canada, the number of immigrants has been increasing. According to the latest Statistics Canada report (2023b), the country has witnessed the highest population growth rate in 2022 (+2.7%) since 1957 (+3.3%). The report highlights that almost all of this growth (95.9%) is attributed to international migration, which means that immigrants are the primary source of Canada's population growth. In 2022, Canada welcomed 437,180 immigrants, marking the highest level of immigration recorded. As a result, youth from immigrant families are expected to make up a significant portion of Canada's youth population.

Racism is a part of their everyday life and is particularly detrimental to young people during the most critical formative years. Therefore, the well-being of youth and how to protect them becomes increasingly important for educators, healthcare professionals, social workers, clinicians, and policymakers. Young people who are racialized minorities experience
discrimination every day. Thus, it is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of what can be done to reduce racism and its impact on youth. Anti-racism theory highlights the need to focus on the empowerment and agency of racialized groups instead of on deficit narratives that perpetuate marginalized groups as helpless victims, on cultivating resistance and activism, and on centring lived experiences and rich narratives of coping in the struggle against racism (Bottrell, 2009; Dei, 2013; Mullaly & West, 2018; Ungar, 2011, 2021). The idea of counter-narratives in resisting oppression was highlighted by Dei (1996) as well: “Critical antiracism asserts that racial minorities cannot simply be presented as ‘victims’, ‘powerless’ and ‘subordinated’ in the study of race relations and conflict. Their histories of resistance and struggle against myriad forms of social domination (e.g., race, class, gender and sexual oppression) contain essential lessons for antiracism praxis for social change” (p. 6). Likewise, we learn from the anti-racism scholarship the importance of discussing the role of whiteness in perpetuating racism and the responsibility of healthcare professionals, social workers, clinicians, and policymakers not only to address whiteness, but also to help dismantle the white supremacy ideology that shapes interpersonal and institutional relations.

The resilience framework is frequently used in social justice discussions, particularly in anti-racism platforms, to acknowledge the strength of oppressed communities. However, the conceptual roots and operationalization of resilience are problematic and can cause harm to oppressed communities. It is crucial to address these issues so that the term can ultimately serve the oppressed communities instead of harming them. Therefore, we must engage with the resilience construct critically to ensure it benefits oppressed communities (Garrett, 2016; Park et al., 2020; Van Breda, 2018).
1.5 Overview and structure of the dissertation

This dissertation has six chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction and background information. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review and the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Chapter 3 outlines the epistemological commitments and methodology of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of the study. Chapter 6 includes interpretations of the study findings in relation to existing scholarship. It also offers implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Racism and resilience: a literature review

The chapter focuses on a critical review of the literature on racism against youth, emphasizing the resilience perspective. To answer my research question, I draw on a range of interdisciplinary works to discuss the existing body of knowledge on the topic in the Canadian context of racism. This discussion is organized into three sections.

The first section will critically review Canada's multicultural landscape and how it contributes to the racialization of minority groups through colour-evasive racism and cultural labelling. I will point out how the societal narratives impact the formation of racial and cultural identities among youth and create racial inequalities. The power dynamics of whiteness, white privilege, and dominant cultural norms will be discussed. I will discuss critical perspectives of traditional multicultural approaches as an opportunity to foster inclusion, empowerment, and resistance against racism. The second section will delve into prevalent theories on identity development and how they are utilized in the context of racial encounters. In the third section, I will provide a critical overview of a theoretical framework of resilience.

2.1 Canada’s multicultural landscape: identity, racism, and critical multiculturalism

Understanding how ethnicity, race, and culture are discussed and defined in the Canadian context is essential for situating the experiences of ethnoracial minority youth facing racial discrimination. Exploring the complexities and nuances of these terms within Canada's multicultural landscape will shape the themes of the study by offering more profound insights into how these defined and perceived identities shape the daily lives of young people belonging to ethnoracial groups.

When discussing ethnoracial minority youth experiences in Canada, it is vital to examine how their identity is defined within their local context. It is crucial to acknowledge that the
linguistic nuances in multiculturalism discourse can be perplexing. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the nuances of this conflated use to contextualize the identity manifestations of racialized youth. The terms race, culture, and ethnicity are often used interchangeably to identify individuals who do not belong to the dominant group, typically of white/European heritage, essentially based on their physical or social attributes (Henry & Tator, 2010; James, 2003; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). When these terms are mixed up, it can lead to the exclusion and labelling of individuals seen as the ‘Other’. Essentially, in these circumstances where ethnicity is described based on perceived physical characteristics, race is the primary factor in defining cultural or ethnic identity, and it is used as a signifier to define who does and does not belong. Assigning a racial category to someone else to create a sense of difference is known as racialization (Fassin, 2011). This process is sometimes done to make race less noticeable or ‘invisible’. This racialization is harmful, often resulting in people being labelled as the ‘Other’ and unfairly excluded.

2.1.1 Ethnicity: tensions and contradictions

Ethnicity is a social construct that categorizes individuals based on their shared cultural traits and how they function within socially established boundaries (Hall, 2000; Weber, 1996). Ethnicity involves a continuous balance between similarities and differences, with boundaries often determined by one's country of origin, shared lineage, and past experiences. Individuals who belong to the same ethnic group share traits such as heritage, religion, customs, values, nationality, language, region, or physical attributes.

Max Weber's (1996) perspective on the significance of cultural attributes and shared values is fundamental in defining ethnic groups. For him, ethnicity is characterized by common traits and historical experiences, and the individual’s subjective identification with a particular group.
Weber believes that the shared memories of colonization or migration are crucial for ethnic minority groups to maintain their sense of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’. Based on Weber’s notion, the emergence of ethnic groups in society may also result in the hierarchical categorization of people, leading to social inequalities when one group asserts power and status over the others. Furthermore, Jenkins’ (2008) notion of “purported cultural similarity and difference” (p. 52) refers to the danger of marginalizing ethnic groups when they are perceived by prescribed fixed characteristics, similarities, and differences. Accordingly, Jenkins (2014) argues that ethnic identification is a nuanced, dynamic, and ever-changing concept shaped by local contexts. Weber’s and Jenkin’s discussions on ethnicity challenge the essentialist views of the construct and acknowledge the complexities that shape ethnic identities, such as power dynamics, sociohistorical and political factors, social interactions, and a subjective sense of ethnic identity.

When discussing the experiences of racialized youth in Canada, it is essential to examine how the concept of ethnicity is discussed in everyday public and private discourses to identify the nuanced expressions of ethnicity. It is important to note that in Canada, the societal narratives in constructing ethnic identities imply that the term *ethnic* often means the non-English-speaking, ‘visible minority’ populations (James, 2003; Jenkins, 2014; Yee & Dumbrill, 2016).

This excerpt from the “Ethnic Diversity Survey” document demonstrates how the term *ethnicity* is used to describe individuals with a non-white racial background:

…the sources of immigrants to Canada have changed in recent decades, with increasing numbers coming from non-European countries. These immigrants and their children are adding to the ethno-cultural make-up of Canada’s population, making it one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. (Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 1)
According to this source, ethnic diversity in Canada is not represented by all immigrants, which would be the case if the authors followed the primary definition of ethnicity, but specifically by ‘non-European’ groups. The dominant group in Canada, white people, classify people of colour with ethnic labels indicating their ‘otherness’ (for the dominant group to monopolize power and status). This way of categorizing people suggests that only individuals who are not white are considered to be ethnically located in Canada, which comes from a viewpoint centred on European and white perspectives. This perspective creates a hierarchy among different social groups, with cultural minority groups or people of colour labelled ‘ethnic’. In contrast, English-speaking Europeans are simply used as a reference point to highlight the differences of other groups and are not actively ‘participating’ in being categorized by ethnicity.

Jenkins (2014) suggests that ethnicity is a process through which individuals are differentiated rather than being seen through commonalities. In his words, it is always “an attribute of the Other”. He insists that ethnicity applies to everyone: “We need to remind ourselves at all times that each of us participates in an ethnicity – perhaps more than one – just like them, just like the Other, just like ‘the minorities’” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 15). Nevertheless, in Canada, people of colour are frequently given an ethnic identity by default regardless of their connection to their homeland or adoption of cultural characteristics typically associated with their ethnicity. It is worth noting that some racialized groups may not prioritize their ethnoracial identity and ethnic or cultural originals, even if others perceive them as belonging to one.

The way people assume shared cultural attributes based on the physical characteristics of ethnic groups can become a form of marginalization. This approach defines ethnicity according to racial categories without considering an individual’s sense of belonging or active engagement
with this assumed racial group. In Canada, people of colour may not identify with a specific ethnic label due to their immigration history and other factors. What is often missing in these misconceptions is a consideration of an individual's sense of their own ethnic identity, which, according to Brass (1991), is vital in creating internal cohesion and differentiation from other groups. Unfortunately, in Canada, it is common to assign subtle terms like culture or ethnicity based on an individual's appearance, which can impose a minority status.

2.1.2 Colour-evasiveness narrative

Articulating *race* without directly using the term *race*, a common phenomenon in Canada (Li, 2007), significantly impacts how young people experience their own identities. This approach, also known as the “myth of racial neutrality in Canada” (James, 2003, p. 42) only serves to reinforce the dominance of the majority group and marginalize racial minority groups (Masoumi, 2020). By emphasizing imaginary sameness and practicing neutrality, we fail to acknowledge the historical and power relations between dominant and minority groups (Delpit, 1988).

The term colour-evasiveness was coined by Annamma et al. (2017) to replace the so-called ‘colour-blind’ racial ideology “to demonstrate the social construction of race and ability while simultaneously confronting the social and material consequences of racism and ableism” (p. 154). With this awareness, I will refer to this racial ideology that ignores the influences of race and racism and centres whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) as colour-evasiveness.

In documents related to immigrants and ‘visible minorities’ in Canada (such as the 108-page Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada from 2005), the terms *race* or *racism* are not commonly used. This is an example of how discussions about race in Canada can be disguised
by “discursive techniques that camouflage the offensive nature of racist ideas by using encoded concepts, a specially constructed syntax, and rationalization” (Li, 2007, p. 37).

As many have pointed out, the approach of colour evasiveness can be harmful and result in hidden racial inequalities. Colour-evasiveness is a form of hidden racism in the modern era that often leads to microaggressions. The ideology of colour-evasive racism is linked to racial prejudice (Neville et al., 2000) and fear of other races (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). It can create a false narrative of denial of racial discrimination, which may prevent opportunities to address it as it perpetuates the belief that “not everything is about race” (Carr, 2017).

2.1.3 Race: antiracism and whiteness

As a response to multiculturalism based on liberal democratic values and avoidance of racial terms, the antiracism framework argues that “in order to initiate effective antiracism praxis, one must question white power and privilege, as well as the rationale for global dominance” (Dei, 1996, p. 10). Race plays an essential role in the discussion of antiracism. Its importance “lies in its socio-historical construction as relations of power among individuals and groups in society” (p. 254).

Not explicitly mentioning race makes whiteness and white privilege invisible and ignores the social effects of race. By ‘deleting’ race, white privilege is exerted by consciously choosing not to think about race and exercising it invisibly. Whiteness is an ideology that gives Anglo-Canadians a position of power and, by holding “a location of structural advantage” (Yee & Dumbrill, 2016), becomes a reference point for positioning all other groups in Canada. White people are a socially constructed group with certain privileges leading to domination in Canadian society. This is referred to by Peggy McIntosh (1989) as an “invisible package of unearned assets”. Based on James’ (2003) study on students' perspectives towards racial groups,
individuals of European descent in Canada typically do not view themselves through a racial lens and identify as “Canadians” or “without culture”. However, they do categorize their ethnoracial minority peers based on race. In Canada, to name ethnoracial minority groups, the term ‘visible minority’ is used in official public documents (Statistics Canada, 2021). It is important to note, though, that this terminology is changing: Statistics Canada is working to determine the national statistical terminology that is appropriate to describe the population of Canada; therefore, the term “visible minority” is currently under review (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Race is a social construct that is used as a marker to define a person’s social location in society and consequently to inform their everyday experiences by defining how privileges are distributed. Members of the same racial category share similar physical appearances, such as skin colour or facial features and historical experiences. Although the biological definition of race has been scientifically rejected for a long time, it “continues to matter as a central organizing principle in society” (Carr, 2017, p. 65). Although ‘post-racial’ discourse in multicultural societies such as Canada or the USA insists that the term race is not relevant anymore, it has been criticized for sustaining “a hegemonic myth” (p.65), ignoring whiteness, and perpetuating racial inequalities. In critical race theory, race is recognized as “a central axis of power”, and the use of the term as “an entry point to engage critical antiracism praxis” (Dei, 1996, p. 9). Race is a significant construct in this dissertation to address how racial labels affect the everyday realities of young people of colour in Canada. As Dei (1996) argues, we live in a racially divided society, and “our racial (like class and gender) identities influence the social and political practices in which we choose to engage” (p. 257).

Unlike liberal multiculturalism, the antiracism framework is an “action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change that addresses racism and other interlocking systems of social
oppression”; race is explicitly named to challenge the ways it “superiorize[s] and inferiorize[s] peoples” (p. 10). The anti-racism framework discusses race as a sociopolitical construct and questions the ideology of whiteness that upholds racial hierarchies. By adopting this perspective, my research recognizes that racism is a common everyday experience for minority youth and that both ethnic minorities and the dominant culture participate in racism in their own ways.

Considering the socio-political influences on race and ethnicity, I refer to participants of my study as either racialized minority or ethnoracial minority youth. I hope to prevent any potential inaccuracies from labelling ethnoracial minority groups based on cultural terms. By using ethnoracial minorities, I recognize that this group holds the subordinate status, unequal treatment, and oppression these youth face due to their association with ethnic and racial categories within the Canadian glocal context. On the other hand, the dominant group that holds the most power in Canadian society will be referred to as white people, the group that in racialized society is viewed as a standard (Haeny et al., 2021).

2.1.4 ‘Culture’ in multiculturalism

According to Rosaldo (1993), culture refers to the different ways in which individuals interpret and make sense of their lives. It involves various aspects of human behaviour, such as customs, norms, values, language, religion, and food. It is important to note that culture can be a part of one’s ethnic identity or can be adopted through social or geographical location. Therefore, culture is a significant aspect of people’s way of life and a crucial part of their individual and

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2 Glocal is used to emphasize the complexities and interconnectedness of global and local impacts in the Canadian context.

3 Note that other sources use the term “Caucasian” to characterize people of European ancestry. This use of ‘Caucasian’ has been problematic and discouraged (APA, 2022), https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities
social identities. Culture helps us understand the world and create personal and social meanings for our daily ways of living.

The definition of culture in the multicultural context is a contested topic. Culture in Canada is often presented from the essentialist view as uniform, homogeneous, stable, fixed, and never changing (Gunew, 1997; Rattansi, 2011; Shidmehr, 2012). This reductionist perspective not only oversimplifies the complexities of historical periods, socio-economic groups, and various cultures within cultures but also marginalizes ethnoracial groups, imposes conformity with perceived descriptions, and reinforces stereotypes (Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Henry & Tator, 2010). Furthermore, within a multicultural framework, it is often assumed that celebrating cultures (especially reducing the celebrations to food, music and folklore) will eliminate racial discrimination and that understanding other cultures will create a sense of unity. It also communicates the message that one can understand minority cultures by gaining knowledge about people’s countries of birth. However, this assumption is flawed as it assumes that culture is something that can be described, practiced, and measured - something “being boxed into a homogeneous and essentialized ethnic category” (Fleras, 2015a, p. 325). What is even more problematic is that multicultural thinking frameworks assume that practices of educating the public and getting to ‘know’ the culture that is ‘out there’ will diminish the gap between groups and help us to understand them (Masoumi, 2020).

Many multiculturalism critics challenged the idea that racism can be eliminated by educating people and celebrating differences (Fleras, 2015b; Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013). Practices like cultural nights at schools and promoting ethnic diversity in the marketplace illustrate this concept of ‘knowing’ and ‘understanding’ the culture. The problematic assumption, as Hall (2000) points out, is that “if the diversity of the individuals from
different communities is recognized in the marketplace, then the problems of cultural differences will be (dis)solved through private consumption without any need for a redistribution of power and resources” (p. 210). Anti-racism approaches and critical race theory argue that this celebratory multiculturalism actually obscures ways to challenge injustice, and by focusing on individual ignorance, it overlooks systemic failures in Canada (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013), including the ideology and social practice of *whiteness* (Carr, 2017; Dei, 2011). In his paper on multicultural policies to tackle racism, Masoumi (2020) contends that reducing anti-racism practices to apolitical celebrations of diversity only perpetuates power dynamics and racial inequalities. He illustrates this dynamic by citing the 1993 March 21 campaign that was held in the offices of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Masoumi (2020) highlights the harmful effects of such celebrations: “Recruiting racialized groups as agents and informants of diversity implicitly reproduced the relation of racial and cultural dominance; after all, not all staff were expected to present their cultures as topics of fascination and interest. Thus, celebrating diversity simultaneously established cultural Others within offices” (p. 714).

Culture is often used to discriminate against people of colour, contributing to social practices perpetuating racial stereotypes and discrimination. This *cultural racism* uses culturally based arguments to include or exclude individuals from different levels of participation in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2011, p. 28). For instance, culture is sometimes used to explain behaviours, traits, customs, or “vulgarized cultural practices” (Li, 2007, p. 43) that may be seen as a threat to public safety or well-being. From an anti-racism standpoint, Dei (1996) further addresses the problematic use of culture to create hierarchical categories. He argues that “while the notion of culture(s) and cultural difference(s) are relevant to antiracism discourse, a
romanticized notion of ‘culture’ that fails to interrogate power critically is severely limiting our understanding of social reality” (p. 254). A critical multicultural framework suggests moving beyond binary terms used to categorize ethnicities and cultures and instead focusing on “building ‘communities of differences’ in which power sharing is as much a concern as the maintaining of groups' identities, cultures, and languages” (Dei, 2011, p. 18).

The practice of perceiving ethnoracial minority identities in these essentialist ways can result in negative consequences and has been criticized by critical race theorists such as Dei (2006) and Willinsky (2012). Additionally, viewing culture or ethnicity in binary terms often leads to a discourse that only applies to non-white groups. Canadian multiculturalism policies are based on the idea that Canadian identity is neutral, without culture, while other ‘cultures’ are welcomed and accepted. The famous phrase “celebrate diversity” implies that anyone who is not Canadian and white is considered ‘Other’ or different. Often, this label is applied to members of ethnoracial minority populations who are viewed as subordinate (James, 2003; Roman, 1993). This type of cultural labelling can subtly perpetuate discrimination and exclusion. It can also lead to the harmful belief that multiculturalism is solely a concern for marginalized groups to solve their ‘problems’ of inclusion into a host society. In Fleras’ (2019) words, “multiculturalism in Canada is about limits and boundaries. Difference may be tolerated under an official multiculturalism; nevertheless, this tolerance is conditional and principled” (p. 26).

The normative racial identity in Canada is associated with being white, a marker of Canadian identity (Nelson & Nelson, 2004). This white normativity maintains hegemonic practices, social order, and power, which is an example of rigid binary thinking dominating liberal democracy (Bannerji, 1996).


2.1.5 Critical multiculturalism

Critics of Canadian multiculturalism often point out its failure to combat racism against ethnic and racial minorities and how its underlying assumptions perpetuate discrimination (Godley, 2018; Henry, 2002; Masoumi, 2020; Tator & Henry, 2010). Moreover, Fleras (2014) goes further in questioning whether Canadian Multiculturalism, as an official policy, is “a form of racism in its own right” (p. xiii). It is essential to recognize that contemporary racism often involves a ‘blaming the victim’ mentality, which is based on the idea of multiculturalism as just and assumes that equality is already in place (Henry, 2002). This view falsely suggests that discrimination no longer plays a significant role in the lives of minorities (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 28). Unfortunately, this downplays the impact of racism and can lead to people of colour being dismissed as overly sensitive or falsely accusing others of racism. In contrast, an anti-racism approach “acknowledges the reality of racism in society and the potential for change” (Dei, 1996, p. 254).

With the awareness of the contextual conditions and negative implications of multiculturalism on ethnoracial youth’s daily lives, my research is informed by the theoretical approach called critical multiculturalism or “new multiculturalism” (Nabavi, 2012, p. 165). This approach aims to move away from marginalizing cultures and instead focuses on creating reciprocal relationships between them while also emphasizing empowerment and resistance (Henry & Tator, 2010). This framework is a response to the limitations of traditional multicultural policies.

The critical multiculturalism perspective plays a significant role in shaping approaches towards ethnoracial identity and resilience. It rejects the idea of dividing people into binary terms of black and white, as well as us and them, which is often present in some celebrations of
diversity within multiculturalism. In situations where differences are noted, those in the majority often get to decide who or what is celebrated or included. The concepts of tolerance and understanding the other suggests that there is an option to reject or disapprove. Therefore, instead of just tolerating or trying to understand others, the focus should be on creating communities where power is shared equally among all groups, where everyone can participate in a reciprocal process that includes them rather than excludes them (Dei, 1996; Henry, 2002). In Fleras’s (2019) words: “The balance between unity and diversity remains fraught. Canada’s multiculturalism seems to promote differences yet expects newcomers to integrate into the social and cultural fabric; in turn, Canadians are supportive of multiculturalism yet insist that newcomers melt into the mainstream” (p. 27).

Critical multiculturalism rejects colour evasiveness and recognizes that everyone is ethnically and racially located, with its main principle being to challenge and disrupt the power of dominant systems instead of maintaining the existing social order (Henry, 2002, p. 6). Whiteness is viewed as a racial position of power, and challenging it is “the starting point of disrupting power” (Yee & Dumbrill, 2016, p.16). Bhabha (1994) refers to it as “the cultural sign that unsettles the liberal ethic of tolerance and the pluralist framework of multiculturalism” (p. 254).

2.2 Racial discrimination and youth identity

In the previous section, I discussed the disputed usage of race, ethnicity, and culture in multiculturalism discourse, highlighting what this conveys to ethnic and racial minorities about the boundaries of their belonging. I also argued that the constraints of liberal democratic, multicultural policies could cause conflicts for young people trying to conceptualize their identities, as they may differ from the categories others assign them. To address these issues, the
literature suggests that critical multiculturalism, drawing from critical race theory, could provide a valuable approach to combating simplistic, divisive thinking. In this section, I will use the previously mentioned tension as a starting point to examine how the conflict that arises in multiculturalism discourse is mirrored in the dominant theories of identity in the context of racialized youth.

As youth enter adolescence, their social circle expands, offering more opportunities to explore and develop their identity (Sameroff, 2010). This increased exposure to the larger community also means their encounters with discrimination and racism increase, which can heighten their awareness of their various identities and define their belonging in new ways. Racism attacks individuals based on their racial or ethnic group. In turn, racialized experiences shape how individuals perceive themselves. For youth who identify as ethnoracial minorities, navigating their identities in a multicultural society can be particularly difficult. They may face challenges of defining themselves on their own terms, as others may categorize them differently.

This section delves into the intricate process of constructing identities among ethnoracial minority youth in Canada who face racism. I examine the limitations of prevalent identity theories in studying racialized minority youth, highlight the impact of societal norms on personal identities and outline a more nuanced strategy to understand identity suggested by critical identity theories. As this section concerns the interaction between identity and racism, it sheds light on the possible challenges faced by young individuals navigating their sense of self in the presence of racial discrimination.

2.2.1 Prevalent ethnoracial identity theories: acculturation perspective

The concept of identity involves individuals defining themselves and being defined by others based on the social groups they belong to (Marcia, 2002). This can be seen as a way to
categorize people based on similarities and differences (Jenkins, 2008). However, in times of global migration, traditional psychological theories about identity that are grounded in ethnocentric understandings (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 2002) are becoming less applicable in today's multicultural societies, such as Canada. Identity today involves cultural aspects that would not be the case in communities without migration experiences.

Acculturation theory has become a central focus of cross-cultural psychology when studying the complexities of ethnoracial youth identities (Berry et al., 2006, 2022; Phinney, 2008). In multiculturalism, individuals are encouraged to maintain a positive identity and their original cultural identities while participating in society as a whole, the acculturation approach examines how a person's psychological and social well-being can be affected by different strategies for adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2013). John Berry and Jean Phinney (Berry et al., 2006) are the most prominent ethnoracial identity theorists in the field of psychology. Although both are concerned about the process of minority youth adaptation in a multicultural society, Phinney’s model focuses on the process of ethnic identity development, while Berry outlines the strategies of adaptation to a new culture.

*Acculturation* is a “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). According to Berry (1992), it is the process of psychological, behavioural, or belief system changes experienced by individuals belonging to a cultural group and undergoing acculturation collectively. Berry's classification identifies the most and least desirable outcomes of adaptation based on how individuals adjust to society. *Integration*, which involves balancing preserving ethnoracial cultural identity with alignment with dominant societal values, is considered the optimal outcome. This differs from *assimilation*, which involves giving up one's
home culture to blend into the dominant society, or *separation*, which involves disconnecting from the larger society while remaining immersed in one's ethnic group culture. On the other hand, *marginalization* results in the loss of one's cultural identity and connection to the larger society, ultimately leading to feelings of alienation.

Phinney (1990) suggested a model for developing an ethnic identity that involves various stages. According to this theory, each stage involves different levels of engagement and participation in one's ethnoracial community. By the time an individual reaches late adolescence, they should have a well-defined sense of self and belonging, ultimately achieving the stage of *ethnic identity achievement*. Phinney looks into how the adjustment strategies in multicultural societies impact this sense of self and belonging.

While the acculturation models have been frequently used to study ethnoracial minority youth, its use received some criticism. One of the critiques is that this framework may not fully respond to the lived experiences of racialized youth and adequately address the challenges experienced by marginalized and oppressed youth whose identities are under threat due to unequal access to privilege in a racially divided society (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Lee et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Mullaly & West, 2018; Wetherell, 2010). For instance, Liu et al. (2019) point out that acculturation to a dominant society may create a “pressure to accommodate White cultural expectations” (p. 143), thus, further perpetuating racism as it ignores “an asymmetric power dynamic between the dominant group and people of colour” (p. 149).

The critical perspective on identity development, on the other hand, acknowledges the interconnected, multifaceted nature of identity that goes beyond simple linear categorization. As Wetherell (2010) indicates: “The intersections between social categories, and the subtle interweaving of forms of privilege and oppression, have become increasingly visible while
postcolonial studies have given voice to a new range of standpoints” (p. 2). Ethnoracial identity, from this perspective, is seen not as static but as actively constructed through ongoing negotiations between a person and the context, embedded in hegemonic cultural practices and, therefore, continuously evolving as shaped by the axis of power. This view can be explained by intersectionality and positionality that consider how identities are constructed, how various social categories are linked, sometimes contradictory, and intertwined with broader power structures that determine inclusion and exclusion in specific societies (Crenshaw, 1991; Grabham et al., 2009; Yan, 2016). Cultural identity theorists like Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Sunil Bhatia shed light on limitations on the linear and binary view of adaptation presented by acculturation theories. Instead, they suggest that ethnoracial identity is fluid and shaped by interactions; it refers to the “subjective process of locating and being located” (Yan, 2016, p. 126). In the following paragraphs, I will explain these arguments in greater detail.

2.2.2 Rethinking acculturation: beyond binary and linear identities

Acculturation theories, as discussed in the previous section, view cultural/ethnic/racial identity and the dominant society as two opposing forces. Hall (1996) posits that identities in this binary framework form boundaries of difference and exclusion. Therefore, in his words, cultural identities viewed in this manner “can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude” (p. 4). Traditional multiculturalism practices can sometimes lead to exclusion when efforts to promote inclusivity end up pushing certain groups away. This tendency to conceptualize people is also reflected in acculturation theory, which assesses how ethnic and racial groups hold onto their cultural roots while either aligning with or diverging from the dominant society’s identity (Berry, 2013). In this way, subordinate groups are
conceptualized based on the extent to which they match the norm, which is determined by the characteristics of the white majority (Mullaly & West, 2018; Yee & Dumbrill, 2016).

Bhabha (1990) questioned the fairness of binary understandings of dominant and minority cultures. He argued that this exchange is unjust, as the host society or dominant culture establishes a clear norm which implies that “these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid” (p. 208). Racialized identity is constructed through a lens of a binary understanding that measures other identities against white identity. From this linear theoretical framework point of view, the extent to which the social dimensions ‘match’ the standard, essentially a white person’s identity, is often used to measure successful adaptation by ethnoracial minority groups. This discussion is particularly important for dialogue about resilience. Minority communities are then expected to adapt successfully by blending into the dominant culture while maintaining their ‘home’ identity. By focusing only on opposites, traditional acculturation theories are limited in their approach, failing to recognize the complexities and fluidity of belonging.

This binary understanding of identity brings back the discussion of the role of culture prevalent in an official multicultural narrative that is built on the ideas of cultural essentialism. As noted by Shidmehr (2012), essentialism assumes that “differences between cultures are due to the difference between their essences or their origins, they maintain that the differences between different cultures remain the same in all settings and at all times” (p. 86). The concept of culture that is commonly used in Canadian discourse assumes that the identity of people belonging to minority groups can be described based on their connection with their countries of origin. This means that their cultural identity is believed to be rooted in their ‘home’ countries, even if they have never lived there or do not identify with the superficial aspects of their culture that are
commonly measured. This approach also neglects contextual factors such as historical and political tensions and power imbalances between cultures, indicating “neutral historical and cultural information” (Shidmehr, 2012, p. 87).

It is essential to question to what extent countries of origin describe individuals’ identities and what this conceptualization communicates about their connections to their cultural roots. Additionally, it is important to consider what aspects of their country’s culture are being used to evaluate their attachment (whether it be food, religion or other customs and rituals). Critical multiculturalism scholars challenge this essentialist approach to identity, which is based on the idea that cultural identity can be understood through an understanding of the individual's country of origin (Fuss, 1989; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013; Shidmehr, 2012). Therefore, as Hall asserts on the non-linear view of identity development: “Like everything which is historical, [cultural identities] undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 2007, p. 131).

2.2.3 Identity negotiations: power and racialized encounters (mutual knowledge)

In a racialized context, viewing identity as fluid and uncertain rather than fixed and permanent is important, Hall (2000) notes, “identity construction is never completed, but rests with its undecidability” (p. 226). This view allows for a deeper understanding of identity’s complexities and various manifestations within a socially constructed realm and, in turn, helps to see how the hidden ideologies impact how youth experience the “Other”.

Another way to homogenize ethnoracial identity is to view it as the primary and dominant aspect of identity for minority youth compared to other dimensions. This approach may not reflect the lived experiences of ethnoracial minority youth as their affiliations with the values of
a dominant culture or other identity dimensions may be more prevalent than their belonging to their ethnic group (Zhou, 1999).

Furthermore, the one-dimensional essentialist understanding tends to focus solely on ethnic and racial categories when considering the identity of minority youth, disregarding other significant social dimensions they may also be affiliated with and ignore the intersections among these social dimensions. It highlights the importance of studying identities within ethnoracial groups beyond their connections to heritage cultures or host societies (Pyke & Dang, 2003). So far, dominant identity studies on minority youth also imply that cultural identity is a fixed category that can be ‘measured’. Acculturation theory indicates that individuals can reach an optimal sense of identity through the “achievement” stage (Phinney, 1989) and “integration strategies” (Berry, 1992). Research that is based on this framework explicitly or implicitly suggests that young people can position themselves in relation to their cultural heritage and identify with it to varying degrees (Sellers et al., 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). A critical perspective on identity points out that identities are socially constructed (Yan, 2016).

Yan (2016) used the intersectionality and positionality framework to argue that all dimensions of identity, including their constant formation and reconstitution, may hold significance for minority youth, possibly even more so than their affiliations to ethnicity and race. In a racialized context, it is especially important to consider how different layers of identity intersect with everyday negotiations in the broader culture. It is important to be mindful of this discussion on multiple identities and their negotiations when understanding youth coping with racial discrimination. As Yan (2016) argues, sometimes young people may prioritize certain aspects of their identity over others to achieve desired outcomes. This could be due to certain types of group membership providing more advantages than others in specific situations. For
example, to avoid racist remarks, youth sometimes may distance themselves from their home culture or hide their socioeconomic status or immigration status. Therefore, when discussing the role of identity in the context of racism, it is crucial to recognize how systems of privilege and power dynamics operate in shaping identities. As Hall (1990) suggests, “the boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference” (p. 227).

Understanding racialized encounters from this view can reveal how these “boundaries of difference” are constructed and how specific identity categories, such as race and ethnicity, can be privileged or disadvantaged in specific situations. This intersection of identity and racism is particularly significant because it shows how individuals’ perceived identity often prevents them from defining themselves based on their own experiences and perspectives. This discussion brings another important notion related to “the subjective process of locating and being located” (Yan, 2016, p. 125).

2.2.4 All identities are racially located: asymmetrical axis of social power

Acculturation theory is limited in addressing the tensions that arise when a person's self-perception differs from how others see them. Many noted that acculturation theory may be ill-equipped to respond to this challenge (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Liu et al., 2019). Much evidence highlights how racism, as a form of oppression, can profoundly impact a person's sense of self. However, dominant identity theories in psychology do not seem to give adequate attention to what role racism and power play in shaping this subjective process of identity formation.

Discussing *whiteness* as an identity in the acculturation theory discourse unravels the systems of privilege and highlights the social axis of power in Canada. *Whiteness* is characterized by “a sense of self and subjectivity that is unaware of its own social foundations” (Hartmann et al., 2009, p. 406). It is crucial to highlight its effects on subordinate groups. Indeed,
as Yan (2016) argues, “A social position is situated on the axes of power differentiation within a particular spatial-temporal context as forces of domination and marginalization” (Yan, 2016, p. 125). Youth of colour and white youth experience identity differently due to their proximity to power. Immigrant youth from a racialized minority group will have a different subjective experience than white immigrants. In some cases, white immigrants fluent in English may choose to reveal their ethnoracial identity. In contrast, for youth of colour, their ethnoracial identity may be more clearly defined, regardless of their English proficiency.

The anti-racism approach informed by critical race theory recognizes that people’s relationships are racially constructed (Nylund, 2016). In contrast, acculturation theories, such as those of Berry and Phinney, are consistent with liberal multicultural discourse where the impacts of race is often undermined. According to Wetherell (2010), "Identity continues to be the place where collective action, social movements and issues of inequality, rights and social justice come into focus and demand attention" (p. 4).

2.2.5 Identities as situated within (racist) contexts

Stuart Hall stresses the significance of recognizing the different “Other” and the context in which they construct, in his terms, diaspora identities, that are constantly changing because of sociopolitical factors. According to Hall (1991), “Identity in that sense is always a structured representation, which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself” (p. 21). According to Jenkins (2008), for ethnoracial minorities, identity formation may involve making sense of oneself through interactions with the Other. Therefore, when discussing racialized encounters, it is crucial to question the role of a dominant culture that defines the boundaries of ethnoracial minority identities to better understand how they are contextually constructed. Ignoring these
forces that shape identities is rooted in an essentialist understanding of identity and does not accurately reflect our multiracial society context.

In contrast, acculturation theory suggests that minority identities operate similarly in different contexts as immigrant groups adopt ways to adapt to the dominant society. Despite Berry’s (2005) definition that acculturation is a *dual process*, which means that both dominant and minority groups must be affected by acculturation, the emphasis in acculturation theory remains primarily on changes within minority groups and their adaptability to the host societies, implying that the dominant culture remains unchanged. This understanding assumes that identity construction is neutral and similarly manifests in every context - the assumption that overlooks the fact that identity construction is influenced by outside sources that play a significant role in shaping the linear acculturation process. Identity construction is an active process shaped by reciprocal interactions within the environments, influenced by time, history, and power systems. When ethnoracial minority identities change, it affects the nation's identities too.

It should be noted that identities are not static and can transform. According to Hall, cultural identity is not just a matter of “being” but also of “becoming” by utilizing the resources of history, language, and culture. He emphasizes that identities are not determined by where we come from or who we are but rather by how we have been represented and how we choose to represent ourselves. “Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Identities are situational, and individuals can have multiple identities that become relevant in different contexts (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Ward, 2008). Jenkins stresses identity's fluidity, saying that it “is not something that one can *have*, or not; it is something that one *does*” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 5).
This brings the idea of positionality and positioning. Hall’s (1990) definition of cultural identity underscores the significance of the context and the individual within that context: “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’” (p. 226). Identity descriptions can shift and are influenced by historical events and the reputation of certain countries (Bhatia, 2007; Maira, 2009).

While discussing these contrasting perspectives on ethnoracial minority identity, it is worth noting the interdisciplinary work of Bhatia and his colleagues (Bhatia, 2002; Bhatia & Ram, 2009), who propose a “dialogical model of acculturation” for studying racialized minority groups. His model, rooted in critical theory, aims to broaden the essentialist definitions of cultural identity by offering an alternative or additive framework for understanding minority youth experiences in racially diverse contexts. In Bhatia’s terminology, who draws his ideas from Bhabha, identities are dynamic and arise from “negotiation” between “here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other” (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 15). Bhatia and Ram’s (2009) study on cultural identity constructions for immigrants from India in the United States offers rich narratives of inclusion, exclusion, assimilation and marginalization, all of which appear to be part of identity formation.

In response to the traditional acculturation model, Bhatia proposed his identity theory, which considers race and power dynamics. His theory suggests that the individual experiences a combination of feelings related to their acculturation process. Bhatia conceptualizes identity in terms of “I positions”, which focuses on the nuanced meanings of identity that individuals
experience at the same time as they are “feeling simultaneously assimilated, separated and marginalized” (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 146). Identity for him is constantly evolving, dynamic, ambiguous, filled with energy, and sometimes resistant. Bhabha (1994) wrote about this experience from a postcolonial perspective, and he suggested the need to re-examine and redefine the opposing poles of identity and instead embrace “more complex cultural and political boundaries” (p. 248).

2.2.6 Identity in the ‘third space’: in-betweenness

Bhabha explains the fluidity of ethnoracial identity using the concepts of third space and in-betweenness. According to Bhabha (1994), cultural identities are constructed in the community, where they are constantly undergoing cultural translation, the process of transformation through “renewing” and “refiguring” the past (p. 5). These concepts resonate with the previously discussed idea of conflicted belongings, where minority youth try to combine different identities and social positions in contexts that set additional demands to fit in normalcy. Similarly, Hall (1996) argues that ethnoracial identities “re-experience” ethnicity through the categories of the present.

From Berry’s acculturation theory perspective, the conflict between these binaries (heritage and ‘new’ culture) refers to acculturation stress. For instance, when minority individuals find themselves “learning behaviours from the new culture” while “shedding features of one's original culture”, it leads to acculturation stress because these two processes cannot happen simultaneously. Bhabha (1994), on the other hand, calls this experience the “third space”, arguing that so-called hybrid identities are situated in this third space, the transformation process over time and history. He defines these conflicting belongings as a place that “gives rise to
something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (p. 211).

According to Bhabha, minority groups express their *hybridity* by taking control of their cultural identities through a process of “re-authoring”. He emphasizes that:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

This non-binary way of thinking allows for the emergence of what Hall calls “new ethnicities”, or, in Bhabha’s language, “in between” identities. By conceptualizing identities as existing in a “third space”, Bhabha highlights the role of time in shaping both individual and societal changing identities. This tension and interaction between individual and societal identities can lead to changes within ethnoracial minority cultures. Bhabha believes that meaningful transformations occur when dichotomous identities merge to create a hybrid identity.

In the study of acculturation stress, Berry notes that this can occur when the identities of one's “original culture” and “new culture” are not balanced. On the other hand, Bhabha describes this process as *ambivalence* and suggests that postcolonial identity is developed through learning to live with and accept this ambivalence. While Berry and Phinney view these conflicting identities as incomplete or ‘not fully achieved ethnic identities’, indicating a deviation from the optimal norm that requires fixing, postcolonial thinkers consider this ambivalence a necessary starting point for examining identity. Shidmehr (2012) refers to this process as “*diasporicity*”, which she defines as "the condition of unsettledness and having no
center, origin, endpoint, and organizing principle”, resulting in constantly evolving identities (p. 98).

2.2.7 Identity and internalized racism

In his concept of ambivalence, Bhabha (1994) explains the idea of “internalized others' identity” that refers to identification, “a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification -- the subject -- is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness” (p. 211).

Bhabha also uses the concept of mimicry to highlight this co-construction. The idea of colonized subjects imitating colonial ideas and practices applies to this discussion. “Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is thus the sign of the double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86).

Based on Bhabha’s work, it can be argued that ethnoracial minority youth may occupy a position that is normalized by dominant groups in society, those who hold power. Internalized racism is one possibility to navigate these demands to assimilate to gain power and it is an important concept when discussing racialized youth experiences. Oppression based on race can affect how young people view themselves and deprive them of “the power of self-identity” (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p. 151). As racism “attacks the core of people’s sense of their own value” (Wineman, 1984 as cited in Mullaly, 2002, p. 162), the experience can lead to resistance or withdrawal. Others may experience internalized racism, in which the identity of racialized individuals shifts to align with the negative definition imposed on them by their social environment (Mullaly, 2018). Consequently, the individual may be forced to internalize oppression and conform to societal norms. Bevir (1999) explains the impact of power on
individuals, stating that “In modern society, people govern themselves by scrutinizing their own
behaviour for signs of sin or abnormality as they are defined by apparatuses of power” (p. 350).

In Canada, those considered to have the dominant identity are typically white, male,
middle class, heterosexual, and able-bodied, which grants them various privileges (Yee &
Dumbrill, 2016). Members of minority groups often construct their cultural identity to allow
them to gain more power and control over their lives by adopting appropriate behaviours or
positions, as previously discussed. One way to achieve this is to learn and become fluent in
dominant cultural practices, such as language, traditions, or values.

According to Pyke and Dang (2003), this process of reinforcing superiority over their own
ethnoracial group members can also lead to “intraethnic othering”. Eisenberg and Kymlicka
(2011) explain this process, where “group elites may actively reshape the group's identity to fit
the preferred categories of the larger society – to make the group's identity seem more ‘safe’ to
the dominant society and to the values of the status quo” (p. 3).

2.3  Racism-related risks and resilience among ethnoracial youth in literature

In the previous sections, I discussed a broader context to situate racialized youth
experiences in Canada. Additionally, I explored different ways to understand identity
contextually by presenting theoretical frameworks in the existing scholarship. In this section, the
application of resilience theory will be discussed with specific attention to the integrative
perspective of the construct as it concerns the experiences of racialized youth.

2.3.1  Construct of resilience

The construct of resilience originated from developmental psychology to examine factors
that help individuals thrive despite experiencing adversity (Garmezy, 1985; Masten, 2014;
Werner, 2013). The theory recognizes that individuals facing similar challenges can develop
different outcomes. Early theorizing referred to resilience as an individual’s characteristics that made them invulnerable to stressors (Anthony, 1987; Anthony & Cohler, 1987). This research was focused on identifying traits that make people respond differently to challenging life circumstances or events. Later, Werner and colleagues (Werner, 2013; Werner & Smith, 1982, 2001) conducted longitudinal studies with children and families in Hawaii, and they found that not only individual characteristics but also family and community factors contribute to the healthy development of individuals. Their research suggested that children with more familial and community resources available to them demonstrated better development outcomes than those without access to those resources.

Although Masten (2001) refers to resilience as “ordinary magic”, she also emphasizes that resilience is a process. Further research elaborated on the importance of considering the contextual influences of resilience. The second wave of resilience expanded studies focusing on “what matters” and shifted attention to the quality of the processes involved in resilience (Masten, 2021, p. 114). The following tendencies of resilience research were directed toward planning interventions that can help support healthy development in the face of challenges. Today, resilience science views this construct (e.g., Ungar, 2004) as a process that unfolds in the interactions within the environment. Ultimately, this contextual and transactional theorizing of resilience highlights the significant role of culturally specific protective factors in reducing the detrimental effects of adversity (Cameron et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2012; Ungar, 2015).

### 2.3.2 The socio-ecological framework of resilience

Generally, resilience studies focus on identifying protective factors that buffer the detrimental effects of adversity on individuals’ well-being. Masten (2021), in her review of the empirical literature on resilience processes, identifies the following protective factors that are
common in the studies: “social connectedness, sense of belonging, optimism, meaning-making, agentive qualities, self or collective efficacy, problem-solving skills and leadership” (p. 119). For children and youth, findings consistently show that the quality of attachments with caregivers, other means of support, and problem-solving skills were the main contributing factors that accounted for successful adaptation to challenges (Masten, 2021).

Regarding resilience in marginalized young people in Canada, Ungar’s notion of a socioecological model of resilience is essential. Ungar’s (2011) approach proposes that in the face of adversity, individuals develop and use adaptable patterns to navigate their well-being when navigating adversity. Ungar (2011) defined resilience as a socially constructed phenomenon that encompasses both the capacity of both individuals to attain health-sustaining resources and their social and physical environments to provide access to those resources. In his definition, Ungar emphasized that these resources must be culturally meaningful for individuals and accessible and responsive to their needs. At the core of Ungar’s (2011) model is a dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments.

Different from previous definitions of resilience that focus on the processes and adaptation of individuals, Ungar proposed a strong emphasis on the ecological context and studying macrosystems (socio-cultural historical factors) to understand resilience. Shifting from a normative understanding of resilience, Ungar emphasized that resilience can appear in “atypical” ways, which are often shaped by environmental forces. What is particularly important for the study of marginalized youth is his principle of “decentrality”, which means shifting the primary focus of resilience studies from studying individuals to studying their environments, particularly their capacity or hindrance to facilitate meaningful resources. This principle is vital in understanding how racialized individuals deal with racism. As the review in the previous
sections indicates, the Canadian multiculturalism context shapes the everyday lives of ethnoracial minority youth in far-reaching ways; therefore, analyzing its role in youth resilience is critical.

Further, Ungar also highlighted the multifaceted nature of resilience, which indicates that individuals’ positive adaptation is changing in response to the demands and support from their environment. It related to the concept of positionality and positioning, discussed in a previous section on identity, when individuals may be taking different positions to meet the demands in specific situations. Similarly, Ungar noted that researching resilience in youth requires consideration of culturally relevant perspectives and the agency of individuals to assert their own solutions to adversity. The idea of individual agency is also linked with a previously discussed subjective sense of identity that is often overlooked by prevalent identity theories. This systemic understanding of resilience includes looking at individual characteristics and behaviour patterns; however, individual-level factors are not interpreted in isolation but are always examined within the broader societal and cultural factors at play.

2.3.3 **Review of existing literature on resilience in the context of racism**

Despite the conceptual complexities of the term, scholars agree that resilience research must include three main questions: what are the challenges and risks that the individuals are facing, what is their adaptive success, and what processes support their adaptation (Masten, 2021). I will use these questions to guide my review of the empirical findings.

*Racism-related risks.*

Research has shown that racism significantly harms young people, affecting their ability to adjust to life. This is true for all youths who come from ethnoracial minority backgrounds (Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Such negative consequences affect young people in various ways, such
as resulting in poorer mental health, adjustment challenges, academic difficulties, and
behavioural issues. Experiences of racism have been linked to depressive symptoms, as shown in
Juang and Cookston’s (2009) study with Chinese American adolescents. Similarly, Romero and
colleagues’ (2014) study showed that experiencing racism was linked with depressive symptoms
and lower self-esteem. Zeiders et al. (2013), in their study of Latino adolescents, found that more
experiences of racial discrimination were linked to academic challenges and lower grades. In
their longitudinal study with Black youth, Roberts et al. (2012) found that levels of ethnoracial
discrimination were linked with more risky sexual behaviour. Research shows that
discrimination from adults outside of school is a risk factor for self-esteem and behavioural
issues in young people, regardless of age. It is essential to study the impact of racism on
adolescent behavioural outcomes when discrimination increases (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015).

Resilience research focusing specifically on marginalized youth groups is growing
(Bottrell, 2009; Ungar, 2021; Wexler et al., 2009). However, studies that focus on resilience and
racial discrimination remain limited. Thus far, the existing research with youth who experienced
racism has been primarily based in the US, and only a few involved Canadian youth (e.g.,
Carranza, 2007; Krahn & Taylor, 2005). Most studies that examine resilience among ethnoracial
minority youth are based on newcomers’ experiences in general. Although they indicate that
experiences of racism are one of the challenges that immigrant youth face, they do not
specifically focus on racism and how youth deal with discrimination. Many additional factors
might increase vulnerabilities for immigrants in Canada. For instance, speaking a language other
than the dominant one, their accent, not knowing contextual information and unfamiliarity with
the dominant culture, unemployment or access to health care (Guruge & Butt, 2015; Kaushik et
al., 2016; Lauer et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2016). It is worth noting that immigrant experiences
may differ from racialized individuals who were born or have lived in Canada since they were young.

*Resilience: supportive factors.*

In previous research, resilience in the face of racism was commonly demonstrated through effective coping strategies (Brondolo et al., 2009; Noh & Kaspar, 2003), emotional regulation (see Jacob et al., 2022), a strong sense of identity (Rivas-Drake et al., 2022), religious beliefs and social support (Jacob et al., 2022; Marks et al., 2020), strength, persistence, and adaptability (Cabrera Martinez et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2008), and academic achievement (Khan & Khanlou, 2021).

One of the essential examples is a review of resilience studies with American ethnoracial minority youth offered by Marks and colleagues (2020). Their analysis underscores the importance of social connections, supportive surroundings, the involvement of compassionate and competent adults, and the development of adaptive interpersonal and self-regulation abilities as critical components in fostering resilience among minority youth exposed to significant risks and challenges. The authors have highlighted that racial discrimination, one of the most identified adversities that minority youth face, hinders children’s resilience and leads to poor developmental consequences. As a result, they say, it is essential for ethnic minority children to be equipped with adaptive coping skills, which can be fostered through ethnic/racial socialization by parents and caregivers. According to the authors, when minority youth receive support and guidance, they are better able to respond to discrimination. However, they may face developmental challenges if they experience pervasive racial discrimination without adequate support.
The importance of external supports and adaptive coping was found in most studies concerned with marginalized youth's resilience. Cabrera Martinez et al. (2022) conducted a literature review of resilience in the face of racial discrimination. Based on the findings of nine studies included in their discussion, they concluded that resilience among racialized individuals is found to be rooted in individuals’ acceptance and pride in their ethnoracial identity and in the presence of a support network for coping with discrimination. In addition to external supports, in the studies they reviewed, interpersonal strengths, persistence and adaptation were listed as protective factors when dealing with racism.

Canadian newcomer youth from the Middle East shared their stories of struggles and resilience in Smith et al.’s (2022) qualitative study. Resilience among immigrant youth was manifested as positive acculturation strategies, such as maintaining a connection to their home culture, accessing community support agencies, learning the language, and developing a sense of community in Canada. Youth in this study mentioned the significance of maintaining a healthy and positive mindset and taking an active role in their adjustment process. The participants noted that their hardships while adjusting to Canada were related to finding a sense of belonging, experiences of racism, bullying and language difficulties. Although this study did not focus on coping strategies explicitly related to addressing racism, the newcomer youth shared that community support was critical for them to thrive despite their challenges. For Pakistani Canadian newcomer youths in Khan and Khanlou’s (2021) study, resources for resilience included religious practices, connectedness with family and friends, and academic success.

_role of ethnoracial identity in resilience_. As discussed in the previous section, racism severely threatens youth identity formation. Literature on the impacts of racism shows that racial
discrimination undermines an individual's sense of self by perpetuating negative stereotypes and imposing societal limitations because of one's affiliation with a specific race or ethnicity.

Ethnoracial identity was also one of the dominant themes in the resilience literature, and several studies found it to be protective against adverse experiences of dealing with racism. Specifically, some studies looked into ethnoracial identity and the protective process through which it supported youth resilience. For instance, Wong et al. (2003) discovered that a positive connection with one’s ethnic group (in their study, being Black) acted as a buffer against academic and psychological difficulties and decreased negative behaviours despite experiencing racism. Similarly, Juang and Cookston (2009) found that Chinese-American adolescents who feel more connected to their Chinese culture experience less depression.

Romero and colleagues’ (2014) study, guided by the resilience framework and identity developmental theory, also demonstrated ethnic identity development as a source of resilience for ethnic minority adolescents facing discrimination. The results of their study suggest that having a strong ethnic identity, which according to Phinney’s definition, involves exploring and committing to one’s ethnicity, can help protect minority youth from the adverse effects of discrimination and stress on their self-esteem. Adolescents at the achieved stage can maintain high self-esteem despite high levels of discrimination compared to those at other stages of ethnic identity.

Similarly, Umana-Taylor and colleagues (2016) suggest that cultivating a positive and strong sense of ethnoracial identity can be crucial in enhancing the ability of young people to deal with racism while also promoting their overall adjustment and well-being. Their findings from research on Latinx American youth resilience who experienced racism show that having a positive sense of ethnic identity can help protect against adverse reactions to peer discrimination,
leading to more effective ways of coping with such experiences. On the contrary, when youth faced discrimination from adults in a school environment, their strong attachment to their ethnic group increased their vulnerabilities and did not have a protective role. The researchers suggest that this finding may be due to the perceived power imbalance between adolescents and adult authority figures. From the social-ecological perspective of resilience, it also signifies the importance of contextual circumstances in the interaction between potential protective factors and adverse events. Furthermore, Sellers and Shelton (2003), in their study with African American youth, also found mixed or negative results on how some dimensions of racial identity are associated with perceived discrimination. For instance, increased racial centrality and group identification were linked with more experiences of racism and did not show to be protective against the adverse effects of discrimination.

In contrast, Brown and Tylka (2011) found that racial socialization promotes resilience in African American young adults facing racial discrimination. They suggest that cultural appreciation and historical understanding significantly impact youth psychological well-being. For example, specific caregiver messages from caregivers that focused on appreciating and comprehending the history of African Americans, including their fight for equality, were especially useful in promoting resilience. In the same vein, Rivas-Drake et al. (2022) in their analysis also conveyed that recognizing and embracing hybrid identities can foster resilience by empowering youth to challenge racism and advocate for themselves in a racially divided society.

Carranza (2007), in her qualitative study with Salvadorian immigrant mothers and daughters in Canada, highlights the role of ethnic identity in cultural transition. Salvadorian immigrant mothers cultivated an awareness of race and ethnicity in their daughters through their everyday activities as an effective strategy for dealing with oppressive circumstances. Mothers
believed that by promoting their daughters’ sense of belonging and ethnic pride, they would be better prepared to resist racism.

*Coping strategies to deal with racism.* Studies consistently show problem-solving skills as having a protective function among children and youth (e.g., Shao et al., 2022). Houshmand et al.’s (2019) study of racialized youth in Canada found common tactics against racial microaggressions include directly challenging perpetrators, seeking support and allyship, and adopting a positive perspective. Coping strategies also included positive self-talk, agency, and racial pride. Non-confrontational strategies such as avoidance, humour, and self-care are protective when confronting microaggressions. In Jacobs et al.’s study (2022), women used more of both confrontational and avoidance coping tactics than men. This choice appeared to be situational rather than personality-based, suggesting that coping tactics are heavily dependent on context.

Noh and Kaspar’s (2003) study with Korean Canadian adult immigrants also supports the evidence that context matters. Their findings suggest that problem-focused coping strategies like personal confrontation, formal actions, and seeking social support can reduce distress when faced with perceived discrimination. However, it had a protective function and reduced distress significantly only in the circumstances of personal confrontation. Their study results also revealed that emotion-focused coping mechanisms, such as passive acceptance and emotional distraction, can reinforce adverse mental health effects caused by perceived discrimination.

In Jacob et al.’s (2022) systematic review of studies on coping with racism, Black individuals used different coping strategies for different forms of racism. This finding across the studies highlights the importance of qualitatively understanding the nuances of racial discrimination, as it can provide a more detailed perspective on the pathways to resilience in the
context of specific racist encounters. Examining a racial encounter and the role of power will provide a more nuanced picture of individual’s behaviour strategies rather than looking solely at their coping strategies. This refers to Ungar’s (2011) principle of “decentering an individual” and focusing on the vital role of the environment in understanding resilient responses.

2.3.4 Critical approaches to resilience theory: gaps and future research

The limitations of resilience theory when applied to marginalized groups has been a topic of critical examination. Scholars have raised concerns over the past few decades about the resilience construct’s conceptual and operational limitations (Kaplan, 1999; Luthar et al., 2000; Martineau, Sheila, 1999). One of the primary criticisms is that resilience theory may not adequately reflect the experiences of disadvantaged groups, address structural inequalities and further marginalize them (Clay, 2019; Evans & Reid, 2013; O’Brien, 2014; Zembylas, 2021). In the following section, I will present these concerns in more detail. I will then add how my research will address these limitations.

The problem of individual responsibility – growth mindset.

The key area of the debates about resilience theory and research is its problematic individual focus (Kaplan, 2013). As Zembylas (2020) notes, this approach depoliticizes resilience by “shifting the blame from socially unjust structures to individuals” (p. 4). Potential problems arise in resilience approaches that place responsibility for well-being on marginalized individuals. This view can lead to further marginalization and blame of individuals. Resilience critics explain that such a perspective is based on individualistic values prevalent in neoliberal ideology and adopted by dominant cultures, which place the responsibility for change at the individual level (Garrett, 2016; Rigsby, L., 1994). The implications for disadvantaged groups can
be detrimental as it obscures recognizing the harmful effects of oppression and the larger structures that need to be held accountable for dismantling racism.

Sims-Schouten and Gilbert (2016) suggest interrogating nuances of how communities express resilience in the context of racism. The authors discussed how members from ethnic minority communities are often underrepresented, and their voices are absent from key conversations about resilience, support, and well-being. Further, they discussed how resilience research and theory is divided into two major streams: one that focuses on the process involving resilience and the capacity to adjust and the other that centers on achieving positive outcomes. With this, the authors highlighted the importance of engaging in making sense of different lived experiences and worldviews. They note to keep in mind that ‘positive outcomes’ are always defined by the white dominant class. Therefore, to avoid the danger of blaming the marginalized groups for not showing resilience, they said that the stories of individuals are paramount: “Only when individuals and communities are heard, taken seriously and their needs engaged with is it possible to truly make sense of what resilience entails and what support is required to facilitate the development of resilience in different social and cultural groups” (p. 91).

Problems with the “capacity to cope” – adaptability and structural inequalities.

Overall, as was demonstrated in previous sections, research on resilience and racism asked questions primarily around individuals’ capacity to cope with racism. Resilience critics assert that by promoting adaptability, resilience often overlooks structural inequalities. Even if recommendations and interventions often included the needed change on the structural level, little analysis was made of how socio-political contexts operate in placing demands on youth to show resilience through self-improvement, personal responsibility and growth. Internalized racism, too, is not a part of discussions in resilience theory, even if individuals’ coping responses
may be a product of self-surveillance and normalized oppression (Clay, 2019; Zembylas, 2020). Therefore, to fully understand the motivations behind these responses/adaptive strategies, one needs to critically interrogate the context itself.

For example, even the notion that one’s identity position is a personal choice independent of community influence (as discussed by Pyke & Dang, 2003) is reinforced by the ideals of liberal multiculturalism. The barriers faced by ethnic and racial minority groups in these situations (e.g., language barriers) are seen only as needed change at the individual level while downplaying the role of structural issues as the root causes that create these barriers (as noted by Satzewich & Liodakis, 2013; Stasiulis, 1980). The traditional multiculturalism idea that everyone has access to the same opportunities for growth can lead to self-blame for marginalized people who cannot meet certain societal expectations despite their best efforts (Mullaly, 2002).

The question of positive outcomes – who defines it? Another criticism of resilience theory is related to debates surrounding what constitutes positive adaptation and the principles of normativity. According to Masten (2021), “Manifested resilience refers to observable ‘good adaptation’ in the context of adversity, by whatever criteria are being applied to evaluate the success of meeting a significant challenge” (Masten, 2021, p. 117). The difficulty when the concept of good adaptation is applied to minority youths is that the dominant groups may define the criteria of positive outcomes. By definition, it means “the absence of pathology, success with age-specific developmental activities, subjective well-being, or a combination of the three” (O’Doherty Wright & Masten, 2006, p. 21). Kaplan (2013) critiques this approach. Kaplan emphasizes the ambiguity and complexities in distinguishing between positive and negative outcomes as complete opposites. He questions whether, in this way, resilience applications fail to recognize a range of possibilities in between them. Additionally, Kaplan brings attention to the
intricacies of comprehending positive and negative outcomes in different fields, including but not limited to healthcare, psychology, and education.

For example, Phinney’s (1989) and Berry’s (2005) acculturation theories, which are often used in resilience research with minority youth as a foundation to operationalize the “positive outcomes” have some limitations. Their approach may suggest that a person’s identity is a measurable essence that can be understood, learned, and achieved, which then indicates positive outcomes, which may fail to acknowledge capturing the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate their adaptation to a new country and maintain their home cultures. Both of these theories view positive outcomes as defined dichotomous strategies, therefore, they may lack flexibility in considering an individual’s adaptive strategies that may not look like “achieved acculturation”, but are creative ways to navigate their environmental demands.

When applying a resilience framework to marginalized youth populations, it is essential to deconstruct the definitions of positive coping and consider various ways of coping under oppressive circumstances. There are some valuable contributions that begin to include a social justice framework to resilience research with racialized minority groups, such as works by Pickren (2014) and Bottrell (2009). Pickren (2014) offers an overview of psychology’s relation to social justice through the lens of resilience. He argues that the current use of resilience falls short in adding a cultural framework, which may be one of the potentials for the field of psychology to deploy to achieve social justice. Pickren (2014) suggests a resilience framework that emphasizes “cultural strengths”, which are part of a person's sense of self or identity” (p. 19).

Bottrell (2009) emphasizes the importance of considering social factors when identifying resilience in marginalized populations. She points out that social positioning plays a crucial role
in resilience processes and cannot be ignored. The normative criterion for resilience rarely applies to minority populations, as it is usually taken for granted by majority populations and applied to minority groups. Her study with a marginalized group of young girls showed that “including resistances in the conceptualization of resilience suggests the need for change in positioned perspectives, structured inequalities, and the distribution of resources for strengthening resilience” (Bottrell, 2009, p. 337). Similarly, Gergen (2003) warns that failing to consider the risks and positive adaptations in the context of culture and class can lead to "the danger of becoming another brand of neo-colonialism” (p. 4). Meanwhile, Rigsby (1994) critiques the idea of resilience, noting that we tend to celebrate resilience while stigmatizing failure or defeat. He says that “our commitment to achievement and success is so strong that we sometimes label lack of success ‘pathology’” (p. 87).

Resistance in resilience: confronting racism. In a society that is built upon ideas of ‘invisibility’ and ignorance of racism, when faced with oppression, individuals must first make sense of the conflicting messages they receive that may contradict their lived experiences. To adapt in these conditions, racialized youth may need to either internalize oppression or resist this dominant ideology (Mullally, 2010, p. 60). However, resistance and confrontational strategies do not have enough attention in resilience theory (Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022).

For example, Phinney talked about unsuccessful attempts to deal with ethnicity and uses the example of Black youth who adopt an “oppositional identity” to differentiate themselves from white peers. Phinney interpreted this resistance as an unsuccessful attempt to achieve ethnic identity and views it as unexamined and unresolved issues surrounding ethnicity, which can lead to “greater risk for adjustment problems” (Phinney, 1989, p. 39). Phinney’s (1989) theory of stages of ethnic development is widely used in research with racialized youth exploring how
strong ethnic identity can lead to positive adolescent outcomes. Her theory assumes that *positive adjustment* is associated with “resolved ethnic identity”, which essentially means conforming to white dominant norms. Therefore, resistance is excluded from the accepted ways of development and is marginalized as “unresolved” issues.

The idea that "justice and equality are assumed to exist" in liberal democracy is harmful to ethnoracial minorities because it leads to the assumption that demands of access and inclusion by ethnoracial minorities are “radical”, “unreasonable”, and a “threat to democratic values” (Henry, 2002, p. 4). When the positive outcome measure is the absence of problem behaviour (or academic achievement) (e.g., Wong et al., 2003) then fighting racism might be viewed as a form of “problem behaviour”, rather than an act of resistance and adaptive coping.

In fact, studies have shown that speaking up against discrimination can lead to decreased depressive symptoms and better overall health (see Brondolo et al., 2009; Noh & Kaspar, 2003). However, there is not enough research that investigates confrontation and anger expression in response to racism from an empowerment perspective and with a socio-political climate in mind. Resilience research calls for studies that integrate the ways of challenging racism. While some studies have shown that resistance can be a healthy way to fight oppression, at the same time, they often view resilience as a personal choice rather than something influenced by external structurally created conditions. The notions that assume the dominant society is neutral and free of racism further shape the discourse of resilience to marginalized groups by ignoring the material, ideological, and structural conditions that affect youth lives (Dei, 1996, p. 9).

Jacob et al.’s (2022) review of studies on coping offers valuable insights into how context defines normative guidelines and coping strategies of racialized people. They indicated that the confrontational strategies of speaking out were used by women more than men (Jacob et al.
Houshman and colleagues (2019) also reported a similar finding: women participants were more inclined to use confrontational coping tactics than men. These findings show how important it is to consider the role of normative societal expectation and whiteness in shaping the lived experiences (and ways of coping) of ethnoracial minorities in Canada, including the limits and boundaries of confrontation and adaptation. These findings demonstrate how normative guidelines define racialized individuals’ behaviour; in these particular instances, racialized men, perhaps, seek to avoid confrontation because of not wanting to be seen as perpetuating dominant stereotypes of being a threat.

2.3.5 Engagement with existing literature: how it shaped the conceptual framework of this study

To discuss the experiences of racialized youth, I utilize the resilience construct rooted in the critical multiculturalism and anti-racism approach to challenge existing narratives. Specifically, this work seeks to transform the dominant cultural hierarchy and how it affects our understanding of resilience in the context of the racialized youth population. As Henry (2002) invited us to dismantle “a hierarchical order of cultures that, under certain conditions, ‘allows’ or ‘tolerates’ non-dominant cultures' participation in the dominant culture”. She then proposed an approach to construct knowledge that is about “lived experiences of marginalized groups through ‘empowerment and resistance’, transformation and ‘dismantling of dominant cultural hierarchies’” (Henry, 2002, p. 5).

My research focuses on both the processes of resilience that are characterized by how individuals adapt to the circumstances and on how their environments are changing to support them. I am looking at the positive outcomes, critically analyzing both the positive outcomes achieved by youth as per their subjective experiences and the outcomes that are perceived by
their environments. With awareness that sociocultural conditions have an impact on individual behaviour, in this study I will focus on the motivations behind youth coping. Building on strengths and weaknesses of the existing knowledge base, I propose the following conceptual stance and gaps that will be addressed in this study.

**Interdisciplinary theoretical framework.** Many critical theory scholars highlight the need for an interdisciplinary approach to resilience (Kaplan, 2013; Masten, 2021; Zembylas, 2020). According to structural social work principles, to effectively study ethnoracial minority youth using a resilience framework, an interdisciplinary approach must be taken, incorporating elements of a bio-psycho-social-spiritual perspective and examining multiple forms of oppression and their intersections (Mullaly & West, 2018). Additionally, Zembylas (2020) advocates that insights from other disciplines (beyond psychology) are necessary to understand resilience as a relational, socio-political, and contextual process.

**Analysis of adaptive coping strategies and resistance.** My work is shaped by the understanding that a complete and meaningful resilience theory must recognize resistance to injustice as a strong indication of resilience, especially for marginalized, oppressed groups like racialized minority youth. Therefore, a resilience framework for racialized experiences must include a rebellious response to racism as an agentive, assertive response to oppression and a measure of resilience to build resistant communities. Additionally, my conceptualization of resilience considers the interrogation of whiteness as a significant source that needs to be examined as a major influence in sharing ethnoracial youth resilience.

**Contextual nature of identity and coping.** Existing evidence shows, that context matters in how youth respond. Applying an anti-racist theoretical approach, I will examine the question of not *how* youth respond to racial discrimination, but *what* makes them respond the way they do.
In this study, I will attempt to shift from individual coping to structural understanding that defines and shapes how people ‘do resilience’. In terms of the context, it is worth mentioning that most studies on ethnoracial minority youth resilience have been conducted in the United States. Given the previous discussion on the contextual factors that matter in resilience theory, it is critical to situate youth resilience in the Canadian context, which significantly differs from the US.

Need for qualitative accounts. Many resilience scholars emphasize the need of nuanced lived experiences to understand resilience; as Sims-Schouten & Gilbert (2022) put it, the research that is done “with” people, not “about” people. Martineau’s (1999) comparison of qualitative and quantitative resilience studies revealed two discourses of resilience: expert discourse and experiential discourse. While academic achievement, developmental competence, and conformity were measures of resilience in quantitative studies, they were not emphasized in life stories. Resilient individuals in real-life stories often express doubt about meeting normative criteria for developmental competence. Behavioural problems and delinquency were not associated with resilience in quantitative studies but were shown “to be a powerful form of communication, a ‘cry for help’ that draws attention to the need of the child or adolescent” (p. 110) in narrative stories of resilience. These stories emphasize the importance of individual meaning-making and reflective experiences in acknowledging past or present adversity. In summary, to address previously discussed gaps in the existing research and literature, my study seeks a new approach to resilience that recognizes broader contexts, systemic inequalities, and moves beyond psychological perspectives.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Epistemological commitments entering the research field

My study is an extension of a research project conducted ten years ago and titled “The Self-Other Issue in the Healing Practices of Racialized Minority Youth”. This study aimed to understand what sense racialized minority youth, which is defined from 16 to 24, make of injustice, discrimination, and oppression and how they cope with this experience (Kumsa et al., 2013). Since my current doctoral dissertation objectives differ from the original research purpose, I will provide my motives for undertaking the current project on data originally collected for other purposes. Let me summarize the original research project.

Approximately 80 young people (aged 16 to 25) were recruited by youth activists from ethnoracial minority communities in Vancouver, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto. Participants identified themselves as members of a ‘visible minority’ group and as having experienced racism. Data was collected through focus groups, and individual follow-up interviews conducted the week after each focus group. Participants shared their experiences of racism, explored the personal meanings of the concepts of violence and coping, and presented their ideas by creating skits at the end of the focus group meeting. My involvement in the project was connecting with youth advisors, recruitment, and facilitating focus groups together with the youth in Vancouver.

3.1.1 Motivations to return to the data

I returned to the data for epistemological, personal, and pragmatic reasons.

Epistemological – interest in resilience. When this research started, I was hired as a research assistant in Vancouver. Together with other team members – from universities, community partners, and youth activists – I engaged in data collection, data analysis, and, later,
dissemination of the findings. At that time, I was completing my doctoral courses for the social work program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and preparing to pursue my research in resilience with families struggling with addiction. I came into this project with my fascination about the notion of resilience in children and youth, which, on reflection, was uncritical and naïve despite its learning possibilities.

My understanding of resilience was initially informed by ‘expert’ definitions (a term borrowed from Martineau, 1999) that emphasized individuals’ abilities to ‘bounce back’ from adversity. I viewed resilience as a measurable phenomenon that could be understood by studying protective factors that led to so-called resilient outcomes. As outlined in the psychology literature, these resilient outcomes were primarily informed by normative developmental achievements such as the absence of conduct or mental health problems, academic success, or meaningful friendships. What this research taught me is that coping with adversity and ‘positive outcomes’ are constantly changing and shaped by many factors, rather than just a set of defined protective factors.

The complexity that unfolded in the participants’ stories of resilience stood out for me as I began to analyze the Vancouver data set using a qualitative content analysis methodology. Some of the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions in Vancouver have been presented in a journal article published in the *Journal of Youth Studies* (Kubiliene et al., 2015)\(^4\). In the initial analysis, we discovered youth sharing stories of strength and transformation when they talked about dealing with racial violence. Reflecting on these emergent themes, it seemed that youth were trying to show up as ‘resilient’ and minimize the effect that violence had on

\(^4\) Please note that my former work is under a different last name, Kubiliene.
them, perhaps thereby resisting the label of being seen as the ‘victims’ of racism. This theme of perseverance and determination to ‘do well’ despite experiencing injustice resonated with my interest in resilience. I looked further into the coping strategies employed by youth that could increase our understanding of protective processes that could potentially reduce the negative effects of racism. One of the prevalent themes from these discussions with youth was their understanding of racism as being deeply embedded in social interactions (which are controlled and governed by a power imbalance), so much so that they often restrained themselves from actively exercising their agency to resist discrimination and choose to disengage instead (Kubiliene et al., 2014).

**Pragmatic reasons.** The pragmatic reasons for returning to this data set are twofold. The incredibly rich data within the original study has so much to offer and had not been thoroughly analyzed. It occurred to me that I could bring fresh epistemological and methodological approaches to re-read ‘undiscovered’ data or provide a new representation. Additionally, I wanted to critically analyze the concept of resilience embedded in the data set through social justice approach lens. Instead of collecting new data for my doctoral project, I trust that it is more practical and ethical to utilize already available resources, mainly since I was actively involved in the original research project.

**Lived experiences.** I bring my lived experience as an immigrant and a social worker into my doctoral project and trust that I can conduct socially just research by maintaining critical engagement. At that time, I found myself being connected to this project on racial violence on multiple levels: my lived experiences of being ‘othered’ as an immigrant speaking accented English and my interest in ‘healing’, which is the focus of the original study and which I approached through my resilience research lens. These are the meanings through which I
entered the research field. The symbolic object of violence that I brought to the group during one of the data generation activities was a grammar book, which was a metaphor for inclusion and exclusion for me. If I had to bring my symbol of healing and violence object today, I would probably bring the same grammar book. Language-based discrimination has been a part of my journey as an immigrant since my arrival in Canada and still today.

My experiences as a social worker with youth in government care and later in health care settings profoundly influenced my epistemological approach to research. In my practice, I recognize the value of lived experiences, the complicated interplay of power dynamics, and the multifaceted manifestations of ‘doing well’.

Specifically, I have become more aware of the extensive trauma experienced by racialized individuals in Canada through being marginalized, racialized, and oppressed because of their belonging to the assumed racial group. It also shaped my critical knowledge of resilience as a contested and ambiguous construct, which, when applied uncritically, can be dangerous and produce knowledge to support the ‘expert’ discourse, leading to detrimental and adverse effects on racialized communities. This experience also shaped my attempts to reconcile the celebration of individuals’ strength, creativity and power without losing awareness of how their struggles are being challenged and dismissed by the systems of power. I reflected on these epistemological entry points when I returned to the data that I collected 10 years ago.

In the process, I have witnessed first-hand the struggles youth face resisting oppressive systems and the amount of strength, creativity, and courage they demonstrate through these acts of resistance, forgiveness, meaning-making, and healing. Now, working as a front-line registered social worker in a healthcare setting, I continue to notice the gap between people’s lived experiences and existing knowledge in the field. I witness daily how racism and postcolonial
ideological beliefs shape the social determinants of health, which were particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social work practice heightened my sensitivity to and awareness of the axis of power, especially the subtle and hidden negotiations of dominance, which are incredibly resistant to change. These considerations oriented my understanding that knowledge construction has an impact on people’s lives; it also influenced my commitment to strive for knowledge that is co-constructed together with the research participants.

When I started to participate in this study, I gained new knowledge and experience that allowed me to see previously hidden perspectives, particularly as it relates to the construct of resilience in the context of oppressive circumstances. This shift was pivotal in my academic journey and the main reason for pursuing my doctoral research.

3.1.2 Theoretical underpinnings of the interpretive description study

Using the interpretive description methodology, researchers must identify their “theoretical allegiances on entering the study” (Thorne, 2016, p. 17). In the following sections of this chapter, I will locate my theoretical commitments around the key concepts in this study – racism and resilience.

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in critical theory, which serves as an overarching social justice framework guiding the analysis of power dynamics, questions dominant stories and beliefs, and critically examines how culture, society, and knowledge creation intersect (Bhabha, 1994; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991; Hall, 2007). Building upon these assumptions, the central tenets of critical race theory are used to examine the “relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023, p. 3). Drawing on these perspectives, the notion of resilience is analyzed as embedded in the racialized sociocultural context. Further, to situate the lived experiences of racialized youth within Canada, I use the
critical multiculturalism framework that helps to examine the intersections of culture, race and societal norms (Carr, 2017). Finally, the anti-racism paradigm will complement my epistemological stance to guide my understanding of youth stories without overlooking “racial domination and social oppression” (Dei, 2005, p. 12). Key points necessary for anti-racist research are a commitment to social justice and resistance to power imbalance, challenging dominant ideologies, critical engagement in resisting the ideology of colour evasiveness and challenging whiteness as a privilege system, as well as the central promise to experiential knowledge (Dei, 2005; Solorzano, 1998).

The critical engagement with biases, assumptions and positionality concerning power relationships and hierarchies between researcher and participants was a consistent central practice in the original research. For example, the research team organized several workshops where they tried out the methods themselves before introducing them to the participants (Kumsa et al., 2015). This strategy is consistent with suggestions for anti-racist research provided by Dei (2005). In his words:

Anti-racism research is not about becoming located or situated in another's lived experiences but is rather an opportunity for the researcher to critically engage his or her own experience as part of the knowledge search. While discussing such experiences in the research process, one must also ask, how does this experience speak to me in terms of theorizing experiences and pursuing political action for change? (p. 2). My present approach to this data analysis is informed by critical race theory, which is committed to challenging the dominant discourses of race and identity. Silenced, marginalized, racialized voices are positioned at the centre of anti-racist research (Dei, 2005). One way to accomplish this premise methodologically is to look for counter-narratives and stories that
create opportunities to challenge the dominant narratives. To achieve this, the researcher must analyze both the dominant discourse and the real-life stories.

Stemming from these overarching epistemological commitments, my operational definition of resilience, as it is applied to racialized youth, refers to the processes in which youth negotiate their identities, immersed in unequal power hierarchies, to maintain their well-being. I look at negotiation as a process in which youth engage in practices that are meaningful to them to exercise their agency to reject the labels ascribed to them by others in the face of experienced racism. I believe that the stories of healing, violence, coping, and resistance will offer me access to the alternative story of resilience.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Analysis of pre-existing data set

Qualitative research on previously collected data is becoming a common practice used to explore different study questions or theoretical assumptions (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019; Wästerfors et al., 2014). The researcher’s own or the research team’s previously collected data can be conceptualized as a secondary data analysis (Heaton, 2004). However, terminology within methodological literature that uses pre-existing data varies, and it is also called data reuse, reanalysis, revisiting, restudying, reinterpreting, reexamining, reviewing, and/or recycling data (Flick, 2013; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). For the purpose of my doctoral dissertation and to facilitate my critical engagement with the existing data, I will refer to the process of analyzing data under different research questions as a reanalysis of the pre-existing data.

The key strength of qualitative data reanalysis is in aid of theoretical advancement. Usually, the purpose of returning to one’s own data for another reading is to observe the data through different theoretical or methodological lenses. In this way, studies make new
methodological contributions and explore new arguments or concepts that previous research procedures have not investigated by using pieces of unanalyzed data or data that have been analyzed insufficiently (Heaton, 2004; Wästerfors et al., 2014). Through new engagement with previously collected data for my doctoral research, I made new theoretical contributions to race-related research. I extended the current understanding of resilience and identity of racialized youth in Canada.

It is suggested that to assess how suitable the existing data are to be used for different purposes, the researcher needs to consider how similar both studies are in their epistemological orientations, purpose and methods, as well as to what extent the original data is amenable to be reused (Asada et al., 2017; Hinds et al., 2013). Much less attention in the discussions on the reanalysis of pre-existing data is given to the processes through which qualitative methodologies are applied and how they are applied when actually conducting an analysis (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). One of the issues highlighted by Heaton (2004) regarding data reuse is the limited descriptions of analytical methods applied in the studies, such as researchers’ close engagement in analysis, how the analysis has been completed, and the methods and procedures used.

Any data analysis must follow the procedures and responsibilities of qualitative data analysis, regardless of whether it is primary or secondary data. In Silverman’s (2007) words: “It is – or should be – the quality of the analysis, rather than the source of the data that ultimately matters” (p. 1997). Moore’s (2006, 2010) perspective is similar; she argues that researchers must approach data as being tied to a research question rather than a methodology. This understanding opens up a variety of analytical approaches, and it is for the researcher conducting a reanalysis to decide to what extent these approaches should be used to respond to
the research questions at hand. Hinds et al. (2013) argue that to decide which method is most suitable for analyzing pre-existing data, researchers should acknowledge the use of previously collected data by asking to what extent the existing data set is accommodating of the reanalysis and how consistent the reanalysis is with the purposes of the original project.

With the awareness of these warnings, in the following section, I provide an outline of methodological decisions I made to answer my research question and discuss a rationale for the feasibility of using the existing data set for the objectives of my study, which is ethnoracial identity, racism and resilience. I will start by outlining the objectives of the original study and my research.

3.2.2 Scope and focus of original research and my study: similarities and differences

The objectives of the original study focused on the concepts of violence and healing practices among racialized minority youth in three Canadian cities known for their diverse ethnoracial makeup. The study examined what sense racialized minority youth made of injustice, discrimination, and oppression and what they did to deal with these negative experiences. Participants shared their experiences of racism, explored the meanings of the concepts of violence and coping, and presented their ideas through the creation of skits.

As mentioned in my introduction, during initial analysis and reflexivity notes, I found that often, youth stories of racial violence and trauma were followed by narratives of thriving and strength despite racial encounters. From my observation, these situations demonstrated youth efforts to negotiate their belonging, reclaim their identity and provide alternative stories for the ‘racialized other’, which they refused to identify with. Themes of complex, contradictory identity began to emerge within this data set. Resilience as a process of transformation in response to trauma (Josselson, 2011) was manifested through stories of agentive acts of
resistance, during which youth tried to reject others’ definitions of them.

Given the perspective that data are not neutral and what data are collected depends on the influences from researchers’ ontological and epistemological perspectives, I am aware of how important it is to look critically at how similar the commitments are that informed the previous study and my research. I am convinced that the existing data set provided rich narratives on youth lived experiences of racism through stories of violence and practices of healing - concepts so closely related to my definitions of resilience. Racialized youth stories of *Self and Other* in the context of unequal power relations that were a focus of the original study are consistent with my conceptual understanding of ethnoracial identity being contested, ambivalent, and ambiguous (Dei, 2005) while they are embedded within the larger sociocultural context.

Youth stories of experienced discrimination provided rich accounts of race-related adversities, and their stories of *healing* informed the discourse of resilience and coping. Similarly, the original research critically conceptualized healing and violence through the complexities between youth agency and the impact of structural factors (Kumsa et al., 2013). This commitment is consistent with my research question exploring how youth participate in resisting ascribed identities and defining themselves while their identities are constructed by larger societal discourse.

Since my research is informed by critical social theories (Collins, 2019), I am especially aware of the hegemonic conditions and power dynamics that may have potentially affected youth responses to racialized encounters in their experience, as well as shaped how they responded to interview questions. Participatory action research was used in the original study, which paid critical attention to power distribution between researchers and participants. One such practice was forming the Research Advisory Groups (RAGs), in which members were
involved in decision-making through various stages of the research, from planning data collection strategies to facilitating focus group discussions. This commitment is consistent with the main premise of anti-racist research as proposed by Dei (2005), which is the shared power of knowledge construction.

### 3.2.3 Research participants and data generation methods

The following participatory and action-oriented strategies of data generation were available for reanalysis. In the first data collection phase, small group discussions were formed in which youth shared their experiences of racial discrimination and ways of coping with it. This focus group data was generated through innovative activities, such as images, performance, and symbolic objects (Kumsa et al., 2015). Three types of activities took place in focus groups. First, participants discussed a fictitious video clip depicting a racist encounter in an elevator. In the clip, a white woman recoils and clutches her bag when a Black man enters. The Black narrator explains that this behaviour, in fact, would provoke a negative response from any Black man. In the second focus group activity, participants engaged in the discussion around symbolic objects that represented either violence or healing to them. The third activity in the groups was developing a skit in which youth had an opportunity to express their experiences creatively. Following the focus groups, the second data generation phase took place. It included in-depth one-to-one conversations with each group participant about a week after the small group meetings. In this activity, young people had an opportunity to debrief about the group experience and contribute new meanings and reflections.

In total, we facilitated four focus groups in the Vancouver area with 18 youth participants (aged 16 - 24). Eight participants identified themselves as Chinese (Catherine, Ervin, Jessica,
Lily, Kevin, Nelson, Sandy, Wilson), three as South Asians (Daisy, Susan, Yvonne), and seven identified as Black (Arial, Celia, Eva, Frank, Kate, Rebecca, Sunny).6

3.3 Strategy of inquiry: interpretive description

The interpretive description, an applied research methodology, provides a feasible framework to tackle my research question. What attracts me to interpretive description is the acknowledgement of multiple data sources to generate knowledge. In fact, interpretive description appreciates reanalysis of the previously collected data and believes that going back to data with new questions benefits communities of research interest: “Those persons who gave of their time to ‘tell their story’ tend to be delighted to know that more people have actually listened, and most researchers are painfully aware that their primary analysis can only have captured part of the entire context of the material they were studying” (Thorne, 2012, p. 91).

Additionally, interpretive description is centred on knowledge translation and the “tension between theoretical integrity and real-world utility” (Thorne, 2016, p. 37). This approach resonates with my values as a researcher within the applied interdisciplinary field but also as a front-line social worker concerned with the well-being of racialized youth and the translation of research knowledge. The emphasis on ‘real world’ experiences is also congruent with the underpinnings of critical theory research, which aims to create an actual change to benefit communities oppressed by power (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Interpretive description recognizes the importance of subjective experiences; however, it emphasizes that these experiences are socially constructed. Therefore, the description is meaningful only when the researcher, in their analysis, situates these experiences within the

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5 All Black youth were born in Africa, except one, Celia, who was from Jamaica.
6 To maintain confidentiality, all names were changed to pseudonyms. Each participant was assigned a neutral generic name, considering the participants’ preferences.
context and bases interpretations against possible contextual influences (Thorne, 2016). This understanding of experiences opens a significant lens to look at contemporary forms of racism, which are often subtle and almost invisible. To truly untangle how privilege and oppressive systems work and to be aware of the idea of *internalized racism* (that was discussed in the previous section), one needs to dig deep and deconstruct the story, considering the interplay between an individual’s agency and the limits in telling the story that are deeply embedded structural forces that may inform what stories are told and how they are told. Therefore, interpretive description, emphasizing the interplay between individuals’ agency and multiple layers of contextual narratives, acknowledges the interaction of both the individual’s story and the conditions under which this story is constructed.

### 3.4 Analytical process: thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, a useful qualitative data analysis method, involves “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). This analytical framework aims “both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (p. 81) is in line with my research aims and assumptions of the interpretive description methodology. Guided by thematic analysis, I was able to report my interpretations of the lived experiences of racialized youth in Canada by exploring the meaning that participants attach to their experiences and examining how the experiences are intertwined with oppressive societal structures. This way of analysis aligns with the interpretive description methodology’s requirement for the researcher to describe and interpret the data field with depth and richness, constantly reflecting on what the data might signify (Thorne, 2016, p. 150).

Roulston (2001) argues, “the assumption that interview accounts are merely descriptions of ‘real world’ events outside the interview setting is seriously flawed” (p. 285). As presented
by Braun and Clark (2006), their thematic analysis method recognizes the researcher’s active role in the analysis process when identifying themes and making sense of data. To emphasize the importance of the researcher’s voice in knowledge production, in their later work, Braun and Clark renamed their approach as “reflexive thematic analysis” (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2023, 2022). Throughout the research, I used a reflective journal as a tool to continue my engagement with data and transparency within the analysis and to maintain awareness of how my conceptual commitments influenced the interpretation of the dataset. This journal was a foundational step in my analytical writing process, as it included my initial analytical ideas, questions, definitions, and theories about the data from the very start of the research process.

When identifying themes from textual data, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the researcher needs to make several important decisions through an “ongoing reflexive dialogue” to achieve a rigorous thematic analysis. I followed their guidance on how to organize the analytical process. First, I decided what counted as a theme and ensured that identified themes were prevalent and provided valuable insights about my research questions. Second, I had to decide whether the chosen analysis included the entire data set or “a detailed account of the particular aspect” (p. 83). I determined that I would be looking at focus groups and individual interviews from the Vancouver site. Additionally, in terms of whether the themes will be identified inductively or using the theoretical concepts guiding the study, I decided to use the abductive way to identify themes, as suggested by Timmermans and Tavory (2012). For abductive analysis, “rather than setting all preconceived theoretical ideas aside during the research project, researchers should enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process” (p.
This approach was in line with the reflexive thematic analysis assumptions, as explicit “ideological commitments, as well as [researchers’] scholarly knowledge” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 849) are encouraged in data interpretation. I used a critical theory of resilience as a guiding theoretical framework to engage with data and develop themes critically.

Once the decision around the themes was made, I followed the practical phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) to conduct a thematic analysis.

1. Re-engaging with data. I began the analysis by familiarizing myself with the dataset by listening to audio-taped interviews and revising the completed transcriptions. I took notes about what was happening outside of information captured in participants’ voices, such as silences, incomplete sentences, laughter, or focus group members’ reactions. I also noted my own reactions, feelings and memories.

2. Initial coding. During this phase of the analysis, I looked into reoccurring words and ideas to start initial coding. Based on the shared meanings in the text, I assigned labels to the segments which is the first suggested step in organizing data. I made notes and highlighted the quotes, ideas, tone of voice or anything that was important and not visible in the text but informed by the underlying theoretical assumptions. I generated short names for codes based on what participants said and noted the latent meanings, which included “the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 84). The first round of analysis I performed manually; later, I used NVivo software to organize my codes.

3. Initial themes and storylines. In the third phase of analysis, to capture the complexities of meaning, thematic analysis suggests exploring the relationships between the codes, comparisons of each code around frequencies, and occurrences within the data set. I
combined codes that “share a core idea or concept” (Braun & Clark, 2022, p. 35) and developed preliminary themes. Based on these themes, I created a codebook similar to what Braun & Clark (2006) call the “initial thematic map”. This codebook included a short description of each code, exclusion/inclusion criteria, and a few coded extracts. I sorted the codes under the “candidate themes” (Braun & Clark, 2022). Braun and Clark critique the codebook approach as not being fully aligned with a reflexive thematic analysis as it may limit the flexibility, complexity and depth of the analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019). However, my codebook was based not on pre-determined codes but on the codes that were co-created organically from the data, guided by the research questions and underlying theoretical assumptions. It helped me to organize my analytical process, start thinking about the relationships between the codes, and share my analysis with the supervisory committee members.

4. Reviewing the themes and developing storylines. In the fourth step of my analysis, I identified boundaries separating the themes to make sense of how they “fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Initially, I identified three candidate themes: shared meanings of racism-related threats and vulnerabilities, responses to racism, and the purpose of coping behaviour. I reflected on how “each theme tells a convincing and compelling story about an important pattern of shared meaning related to the dataset” and responded to my research question (Braun & Clark, 2022, p. 35). In this stage, I selected the quotes in the dataset that would best describe the shared core idea of the themes. To illustrate the established relationships among the storylines, I developed a conceptual map. See Figure 1. Conceptual Map.
5. Refining stories in the themes. In this stage of analysis, I started to write an initial report for each defined theme with the interpreted description of the stories they tell and how they contribute to the research question. I reviewed the sub-themes in relation to the core idea that the theme presents. In this stage of the analysis, I noticed that the third theme that was identified previously, the ‘purpose of coping behaviour’, was overlapping with the other two themes. Therefore, I combined it with the other two themes. My next two chapters include the description of the stories of the two main themes that were identified from the data. The final chapter of my dissertation contains my discussion of the findings in the context of the broader literature, my research questions and objectives.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Map**

### 3.5 Potential methodological limitations and ethical considerations

One concern that may significantly impact data analysis is the time that has passed since
the original data collection. This concern can potentially pose several limitations related to important changes that appeared within that time gap, within the context, concepts, or researchers’ social locations (e.g., Mauther & Parry, 2009). Atkinson (1992), in his valuable thoughts on the reanalysis of his previously collected data, asserts that even though field notes and other reflexive practices were available for him during reanalysis, they seemed somewhat alienated and not consistently engaging anymore. I kept these warnings in mind as they indicated that I needed to re-contextualize my data and establish new “engagements” with it (Bishop, 2017). Given that in a qualitative inquiry, data construction is a continuous process, and the analysis is always situated in the context, I tried to implement techniques that helped me to re-engage with the data meaningfully. I used reflexive journal writing to be aware of my biases, changing assumptions, and social location, as well as to develop a unique relationship with data in constructing a rigorous analysis. To counterbalance this limitation, I was re-reading transcribed interviews, my memos and notes over the course of data analysis; as well, I was in communication with the researchers who participated in the data generation to fill potential contextual gaps. Also, according to Braun and Clark (2019), quality data analysis requires “deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative” (p. 591).

The original study was approved by the UBC Ethics Review Board. The research participants agreed to participate in the study and provided their consent for using their data in any future publication related to the study. They were offered an opportunity to contribute to a study that aims to add to knowledge about the experiences of racism in Canada and the ways ethnoracial minority youth deal with racism. To consider ethical implications in this research, I use reflexivity on acknowledging my social location in researching sensitive and deeply
personal experiences of racism in Canada. Although I share the experiences of being an immigrant and speaking accented English as markers of being the Other in relation to Canadian identity, I recognize that I have other privileges such as being a white, European ancestry, heterosexual woman, and a doctoral student who is conducting a study focused on racism against racialized minority youth in Canada. This locates me in a more privileged position than the participants regarding race. Through the critical engagement in my own whiteness and participation in systemic oppression, I tried not to impose my own experiences of immigration and my journey of ‘becoming Canadian’ because I am aware that the focus of my research is on the oppression related to race and racialization rather than immigration itself. I recognize, though, that it may have not been possible to achieve that at all times.

I also acknowledge that my doctoral project poses a research question that is different from the original study. This raises another ethical dilemma that lies within the idea that the participants gave consent to the previous study but did not give consent for their stories to be used in my study. Although I believe that looking from another perspective at the stories youth shared with us is congruent with the values and promises of the original study, it required ongoing reflexivity on my part to ensure that my research benefits racialized people of colour in Vancouver and is congruent with ethical commitments of the original research. Similarly, Thorne (2016) warns, “while secondary analysis can seem appealing in that it allows one to sidestep the time-consuming process of ‘fieldwork’, it requires a very serious and thoughtful treatment of the nature and limitations of the existing data sets, and therefore should not be taken lightly as a way of doing easy ‘armchair’ research” (p. 92). I am very aware of these limitations in my data and acknowledge that re-entering the field brings additional ethical challenges. To compensate for the limitation of not being able to return to participants or
wanting to test my observations, Thorne (2016) suggests a strategy of the “thoughtful practitioner test”, which allows the researcher to test their observations against an experienced practitioner who has a long-lasting involvement with the concerns of the research. The “thoughtful practitioner”, according to Thorne’s suggestions, can be someone who is affiliated with settlement organizations in the community and who has seen the daily struggles of racialized youth and who may provide a perspective on how the oppressive systems work. This strategy benefitted my study as I was able to ‘test’ my interpretations sharing them with my committee members, social work colleagues during our discussions on anti-racism practice implementation in healthcare as well as with practitioners at the refugee settlement organization.

Since I am focusing attention on the vulnerabilities of racialized minority youth and the ways youth respond to racial encounters, I understand that the potential harm of my research is that of perpetuating negative stereotyping of ethnoracial minority youth. Recognizing these risks, I took particular measures to avoid making generalizations about youth coping alone and shifting the focus to power dynamics and the responsibilities of their ecological systems to facilitate their resilience.

In addition to ongoing reflexivity, I used continuous involvement in social justice initiatives, as I was a part of anti-racist initiatives at Vancouver General Hospital, engaged in critical thinking and readings, and in amplifying alternative stories of those who have been silenced and muted for a long time – all are commitments that I have been able to practice every day as a social worker and social justice researcher. As my research demonstrated, racism-related studies must be a concern of dominant groups who aim to change racial inequalities in our society. For anti-racist research, it is important to amplify the voices of racialized groups
and acknowledge the larger structures that are accountable for dismantling racism. Instead of focusing on ‘helping’ and ‘increasing someone’s capacity to thrive’, the efforts must be directed towards dismantling the systems of whiteness and privilege. Whose interests the analysis will serve must be critically examined through the ongoing reflexivity of the researcher, who aims for transparent, ethical, and socially just research.

3.6 Reflexivity and subjectivity: personal engagement and my social location

To “facilitate gaining entry into the field”, the interpretive description methodology stresses the importance for the researcher to “surface, acknowledge, and reflect upon what ideas we hold that may be influencing us in the design and implementation of this project” (Thorne, 2016, p. 77). In this section, I will position myself with respect to ethnoracial identity and resilience and identify my social location. My social location as a white, immigrant woman, a single parent, whose identity struggles and lived experiences influenced my view on injustice and resistance, especially to someone else’s version of who I am and how I should be. These personal experiences of ambivalence have shaped my identity for more than 15 years since I immigrated to Canada.

I bring to this research my multiple social positions, and my belonging to the group known as whites gives me complicated access to whiteness. My negotiations with questioned Canadianness begin every time I use my voice to express myself. By being an immigrant and speaking in accented English, to this day, I embody multiple positions of “I” and “me” through someone else’s story of me as the Other.

I am no longer able to name a place in the world that can represent my culture because there is no place that can offer a truly Lithuanian-Canadian center for me to settle in. While I long for home every day, and while that everyday longing for home can sometimes tear me apart,
I have learned how to stay in that ambivalence because this ambivalence, the “third space” in Bhabha’s terms, becomes one of my true belongings. Being a newcomer in Canada and ‘too’ Canadian in Lithuania has been my fertile psychological space, producing growth that has brought me to this place I now inhabit. This in-betweenness has become my newly constructed hybrid identity.

As a Ph.D. student and researcher, I have increasingly adopted a Canadian English identity, giving me access to and participation in knowledge-making at an elite university. I negotiated my mothering through the eyes of my children while they were adapting to this new country as I navigated my parenting role in the school system that is more familiar to my kids than to me. My work with youth for the BC Government and as a social worker at Vancouver Coastal Health granted me access to power and privilege to participate in the decision-making that shapes the lives of the most marginalized and deprived groups in Vancouver. This participation, though, has been constantly limited based on my other intersecting locations mentioned before, seen by local people as not one of ‘us’. As an immigrant from Europe, I hold a privileged immigrant status. However, merely being from Lithuania diminishes some of that privilege since I grew up under a Soviet communist regime. This has caused others to perceive me as ‘less European’ with respect to the norms established by Western values and geopolitics. This brings me back to thinking about tensions drawn from a critical multiculturalist perspective guiding my work, which forgoes binaries and instead adopts the issues of racialized identity discussed within the framework of “interlocking systems of social oppression” (Dei, 1996, p. 25).

Traditional multiculturalism discourse makes us believe that the problem of ethnoracial identity being attacked by racism is a problem of the individual and, according to that understanding, boundaries are inaccurately perceived as a personal choice. Thus, bouncing back
and resisting racist attacks is perceived as a personal level matter (i.e., that can be overcome by employing interventions on an individual level based on ideas of adaptation and tolerance).

However, all these practices conceal the position of the oppressing systems of *whiteness* and the ways in which subordinate groups internalize oppression or engage in resistance against the dominant ideology (Mullaly, 2002). This tension, when an individual’s own sense of belonging conflicts with the racialized categories ascribed to them by others, is the central point of connection between the three main themes of my study: racial injustice, shifting identity, and resilience of the oppressed. Looking at how these three themes interconnect using a systemic, structural lens, the binaries separating them do not seem as crucial as *whiteness*, acting through power, privilege, and (in)visibility.
Chapter 4: Youth-identified impacts of racism

This chapter is one of the two findings chapters in which the impact of racism on the everyday life experiences of ethnoracial youth is discussed. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I share youth stories that highlight the spatial aspects of racism and experiences pertaining to the local context. The second section contains youth reports on the ways that racism is revealed in routine daily interactions, particularly through stereotypes, daily demands, norms, and expectations.

4.1 Racism domains in the glocal context

When reporting on encounters with racist threats, participants emphasized the nuanced forms of racism relative to the ideals of Canadian multiculturalism. They discussed how specifically these ideals play out in their lives. They shared how a multicultural climate implies realities that do not always reflect their everyday experiences and interactions as racialized persons. Considering the overarching theme of multiculturalism as a distinctive feature of Vancouver-based racism, the following themes will be discussed in this section to explore the context in which racism occurs. First, I will present youth perceptions of the notion of Canadian multiculturalism and racism on the societal level; second, youth stories on public spaces where racism typically occurs; and third, experiences of racism in their immediate environment, such as school and neighbourhood.

4.1.1 Racism in the context of Canadian multiculturalism

Youth described their experiences as racialized persons in Vancouver by discussing their perceptions of multiculturalism and its relation to racism with some comparing their encounters with racism while living in the United States. Vancouver-specific examples of racism were discussed in relation to the contradictions and the paradoxes of multiculturalism that do not live
up to its promises. Specifically, youth experiences showed how multiculturalism in Canada does not guarantee inclusion and racial justice.

Kate (Black) reflected on the idea that the existence of various ethnoracial minority groups does not guarantee togetherness and full participation. She questioned the performative nature of multiculturalism and the illusion of inclusion and solidarity that it creates. Kate pointed out that having many nations represented does not mean acceptance and equality or a racism-free society. She could see that Canada’s version of multiculturalism was in the form of celebrating events and holidays from the countries of origin, but that “doesn’t really signify anything”. Kate questioned the fact that acknowledgement and celebration of different countries does not end segregation or guarantee the safety of racially oppressed people.

Black people … Indian people... different races. Yes, you acknowledge their significance, their countries and … you celebrate stuff in a country, events, and holidays. They do that, as you have different events each time. But there’s still some limitations that are felt there… - Kate

Chinese and South Asian youth reported their perceptions of racial separateness considering the romanticized ideas of multiculturalism that are prevalent in Canada. To describe her ambivalence with multiculturalism, Catherine (Chinese) used a metaphor of comparing Vancouver to a rainbow:

…if you asked anyone to describe Canada, they would get ‘multicultural’. And I really disagree with that because you are still separate and ... because they would compare it to a rainbow maybe, how there’s different races, but … even in a rainbow, all these colours are separate. They still have some sort of boundary and it’s not like someone took the pen and mixed all the colours together. I don’t feel that multiculturalism is true. - Catherine
Essentially, what these reflections on the limitations of multiculturalism imply is youth feeling a lack of solidarity: they acknowledged that there are different ethnoracial communities in Vancouver, but they did not feel that they were an equal part of that community in a way that would allow them to feel as ‘one of them’ and feel protected. Therefore, even with claims of multiculturalism and diversity, real solidarity may not actually exist. As Arial (Black) pointed out, “Vancouver is multicultural, but only to some extent”.

Four research participants lived in the United States before they came to Canada. Frank (Black) said that when he came from Los Angeles, he found it “really different in Vancouver” as LA is much more multicultural, where “no one cares what colour you are”. He acknowledged that, of course, there’s racism everywhere, but that he was much more aware of it when he came to Canada. Frank shared that in Vancouver he would feel that he was constantly being watched, which was a new experience for him.

I get it everywhere: on the bus, walking on the street, you name it. Sometimes in the movie theatre you’re watching a movie, and you realize it’s three or four people in different sectors of the theatre, watching you watch the movie. Do I watch a movie different, with my eyes coming out my head? Like I didn’t realize I had these extra appendages, or something, you know. - Frank

Similarly, Kate reflected on racism in Vancouver and described how she feels more racialized in Vancouver than when she was in the US.

I’m new in Vancouver, going into my second year, but honestly… I know, I lived in the States for seven years, but I felt like... Yes, Vancouver was always portrayed as a multicultural society. We are multi-cultural. I see that. I see a lot of inter-racial marriages
like I have seen in the States. But I still think racism exists because actually, I felt it more here than there. – Kate

Other Black participants spoke about how they felt their distinguishability is more pronounced here, precisely because there is not a large Black community in Vancouver. Frank, for example, shared his experiences of being watched intently in various public spaces.

Black youth described Vancouver racism as catching them by surprise, mainly because of appearing so subtle. As Rebecca (Black) elaborated on the overt and covert differences of racism between the US and Canada, she said that in the US, she is “always just expecting it, so in a way [she] is more prepared”, but in Canada, as they said, racism is “more underlying”. She continued by saying that Canadians feel more modern, “so they have to be kind of secretive about their racism”. In this sense, racism in Vancouver is more implicit, according to Rebecca: “I don’t think everybody is racist, but I think there is more… it is way more underlying. They don’t know really how to deal with it. … No, they don’t want to face it. They don’t even like to acknowledge it at all”.

Related to the underlying expressions of racism, all youth talked about the disconnection that they constantly feel between claims of multiculturalism or inclusiveness in this society and what really exists in their reality. Rebecca, like many participants, attributed this felt sense of disconnect to the idealized notions of multiculturalism and how it prevents people from actually seeing racism. Echoing Rebecca’s point, Arial reflected on the idea that Vancouver fails to acknowledge that racism exists, and instead of naming it, people tend to “put it over”, as she says, and pretend that “oh yeah, we are cool”. These (in)visible, subtle forms of racism are a significant theme that was discussed by youth throughout the entire project. Almost all participants shared instances of being treated differently and unfairly in various places, shops, or
restaurants, yet they hesitated to call these experiences racism, feeling that in these contexts, the dominant culture of Canadians may not recognize these instances as racism.

4.1.2 Everyday racism in public spaces

Youth shared how racism exposes itself everywhere by giving examples of racist encounters in everyday public spaces. Regarding the locations of overt racism, the common feature of youth’s stories emphasized there were spaces where youth had reasonable expectations of feeling safe, whether skateboarding with friends, in a public bathroom, shops or restaurants. For example, two participants discussed their encounters with police. Frank recalled several incidents of being stopped on his skateboard and of having it confiscated. He felt that he was skateboarding lawfully and yet was still repeatedly questioned by the police, had also been fined, and had his skateboard confiscated, ultimately leading to his feeling of being harassed and used as a “money-making scheme”. He expressed frustration with the feeling that there were unwritten rules for people of colour, and that any dialogue he tried to engage in invariably constituted being ‘confrontational’.

I had so many altercations with the police in Vancouver, it’s ridiculous. And I’m not even talking jail time. I’m just talking about getting eleven skateboarding tickets in a year and a half. Meanwhile, a friend of mine was driving his friend’s car with no license, or any other proof that he was allowed to use the car. They left him, pulled me over and gave me a ticket, next to the skate park. You know, things like that. - Frank

Yvonne (South Asian) shared an incident when she witnessed police treating ethnoracial youth unfairly and escalating the situation while calling them racist names:

I have heard the cop saying ‘Oh, get your Hindu ass on the floor’. Was it really necessary to say, ‘oh, your Hindu ass?’ Just say instead ‘get your bum on the floor or something’. It’s
just because they know that ‘oh, if I bring race into it, it will cause more reaction’, so what can you really say? - Yvonne

More overt forms of racism in supposedly unnoticeable public spaces, such as washrooms, were reported by Nelson (Chinese) and Catherine (Chinese). Both participants described encounters with racism there, which is a “private” and intimate space in a public context. Nelson described how when he was a student at Langara College, “there were a lot of racist messages, even in the washroom, everywhere”. He shared:

They would put those … Hitler, Nazi signs on a Chinese thing, you know, and then they would say Chinglish or go back to China, whatever. Those show up here, [and the message is] ‘go back. You do not belong here, so go back’. … They wrote a lot of things in the washroom. – Nelson

As racism in Canada, or specifically in Vancouver, has largely been in a covert form, a racially marginalized person is more likely to be identified by a racist term in the washroom than, for example, in the classroom. The washroom may be seen as a more secluded area and one in which certain things can be said and done that could not be iterated in more open spaces. Areas like washrooms have thus gained names for their purposes of being private areas, and therefore, the words exchanged in such areas are often called ‘locker room talk’. Catherine shared her encounter in the washroom of a store:

I was waiting for my friend and then there’s this Caucasian lady when I came in [to the washroom]. She’s really young, probably in high school, and she looked like she was drunk. She came in and then she saw me and shoved me on the shoulder and she’s like ‘move away bitch’. That was really a sad way and I think there was also a racial term that she used as well. – Catherine
In other public places, covert racism is often displayed in a more subtle manner. Ervin (Chinese) talked about his experiences in a restaurant with predominantly white customers. Interestingly, Ervin told the story of being ‘othered’ and labelled in the restaurant, but he was reluctant to directly call it racism.

When you walk in [to the restaurant], you definitely notice that the people are looking at you like, ‘oh, why are you here, you know, you don’t belong here, you don’t eat this kind of food.’ I get up to the cashier and order my food and the two people there who were… Caucasian, they, instead of serving me they started talking to each other and not giving me that type of customer treatment that you want from the restaurant. So definitely you notice some changes in behavior. I don’t know if you can necessarily attribute that to racism, but… definitely there’s something there. - Ervin

It was a very common response among youth when they did not identify themselves as targets of racism in the stories they shared although they clearly articulated a “felt sense” that racism was taking place. When racism occurred in such an unspoken, subtle way, they would often talk about situations where they were not able to articulate or locate racism because of the difficulty in pinpointing it as something that is so deeply incorporated into everyday life.

Youth reported that racism is not only confined to physical space; it is also extended to cyberspace, such as media and their phone. One place to easily spot racism was the phone, as the communications that flowed through their phones could often be laden with racist messages. Given that the phone is such an integral part of young people’s lives of youth and is so easily accessible, perhaps always being in one’s pocket, many described it as a symbol of a powerful tool to perpetuate racism. It is like carrying violence in your pocket, as one can potentially get exposed to racial attacks every time they take their phone out. Participants talked about music
being in their phone and friends being on their phone, both of which could be a tool of racial violence in cyber space. Like Ervin said,

…so much of violence is from communication, so … I know a lot of people text back and forth, and maybe they are not always funny text messages, maybe there could be threats or maybe … verbal abuse. I’ve seen it happen to many people, and it depends on the way cell phones are used, and let’s say the media in general, like TV and radio. They are powerful tools. They could be tools for healing, but then they’re also dangerous ‘cos they can be forms of violence when they are not used properly. - Ervin

All forms of media were presented as potentially dangerous tools that perpetuate racism. These platforms are able to facilitate communication that is easily accessible, but often created based on white supremacist values, disadvantaging racialized groups. Almost all participants noted media as a vehicle that represented racial violence to them. Examples included Susan’s (South Asian) accounts of racism in newspapers and TV; Yvonne talked about iPods and aggressive lyrics in music; and all Black youth reflected on media representations of them. In the second section of this chapter, I will describe how racism is perpetuated in the media and how it is further activated in the daily lives of racialized youth.

4.1.3 Spatial segregation in neighbourhoods and schools

As was evident in the previous discussion, participants challenged the ideas of diversity and promotion of differences, which, in their view, create more division than inclusion. When talking about the multicultural realities they live in, youth shared about constantly facing limits and boundaries, whether physical or intangible. Specifically, they said that the product of multiculturalism that plays out in their lives is seeing their ethnoracial groups as fixed and
homogenous. Participants shared examples of navigating racially-segregated spaces in their immediate environments, such as neighbourhoods and schools.

*Ethnoracial divide in neighbourhoods*

Youth pointed out that even if Vancouver is multicultural and diverse, it is also very separated when it comes to its neighbourhoods, a space where their everyday life takes place. Youth discussed how they could see that their communities existed in enclaves in Richmond and Surrey, and they could see that it influenced how they view each other as “they stick with their own kind”, in Susan’s words. Youth talked about the concentration of particular ethnic groups in specific areas of Greater Vancouver that creates even more division and exclusion. For example, Arial (Black) confronted struggles in searching for a place to fit in while her family was moving to different neighbourhoods in and around Vancouver. At various times her family lived in Richmond, with a predominantly Chinese population, then Surrey and Delta, with a predominantly South Asian population. She talked about how, while there was a measure of acceptance in the Richmond and Surrey communities for the common aspect of simply being ‘not white,’ she could still feel that there was never any full acceptance from those communities because, as Arial says: “I’m a different race”. She described how she again did not feel that her family belonged anywhere, because they never belonged to the ethnoracial group of the majority in the neighbourhood.

If you go to Delta, they still practise their …festivals, …they block off the streets, the Municipality of Surrey has allowed them to do that, so they still practice their culture, right. And then we moved out of Delta and we moved into Fraser Heights, then the area that we live in now is upper-middle class, upper-middle class to upper class. And people that live there… it was generally a white neighbourhood. … for only Caucasians that lived
there, and now they are starting to be all Koreans that live there as well. So, you are either
Korean or you are white. Not a lot of Black families, very few and far between. So, when
we had moved, we weren’t very welcomed by the neighbourhood. - Arial

Ethnoracial divide in schools

Since the majority of participants were high school students or recent graduates, their
stories often demonstrated how commonly racial encounters occurred at school and the theme of
ethnoracial divide came up as their major concern. The boundaries that became clear between
ethnoracial groups in neighbourhoods led to a deeper understanding of the effect on schools
where students were also being separated according to their ethnic identity.

Catherine described how Chinese students have a designated area at school that is labeled
“Chinatown”. She explained that on the staircase going up to the third floor someone wrote
‘Chinatown’ on the wall with an arrow pointing to the hallway “because there’s a lot of Asians
hanging out there”. Catherine further explained that every other ethnoracial group has their own
area where they spend time and that the area for Chinese students is painted yellow, “because
Chinese are usually labelled ‘yellow’”.

Similarly, Wilson [Chinese] described his school demonstrating how the geographic setup
of schools constitutes the schools’ tacit approval of segregating their students’ populations.

My school is smaller than some of the others. The first floor is painted blue. The second
floor is green and the third floor is yellow, and that’s where the Asians eat. In that way it’s
like hers [Catherine’s school]. – Wilson.

In addition to the fact that physical spaces were separated based on students’ ethnoracial
identities, youth also described how this divide impacts their friendships as they tended to spend
time primarily with their own ethnic groups at school. Like Daisy (South Asian) said, “Brown
kids were hanging out with Brown kids, Asians would hang out with the Asians”, that “everybody made cliques of their own groups and races”. Susan added that “because people have these boundaries, people feel more comfortable with their own kind”.

Youth reported that they are constantly navigating spaces divided according to their ethnoracial groups and how it seemed almost impossible to cross the divide. Youth reflected on how their friends would fall into the habit of sticking together with the same ethnic identity. One of the examples that Chinese youth raised about what prevents them from being friends with white peers, was a different value system and outlook on life. Jessica (Chinese) explains why she has more Asian friends now than in the past:

A lot of times, personally, I think it’s because our values are different. I sometimes think their [white people’s] sort of rationales are so different than ours. Sometimes I would find their behaviours or what they say to each other disrespectful or sometimes, I think, immature. Not to be offensive or anything, but... I used to have birthday parties with them, hahaha... a long time back. - Jessica

Participants had an idea about why they did not bond well with their white peers. They were not able to clearly articulate why they would not be friends with *other* ethnoracial minority youth. For some reason, they felt that friends being from their own groups was the ‘natural order’ of things. Without having made a conscious decision to have things be that way, they adhered to the expectations that the groups would stick together.

While pointing out the differences in how they experience racism, youth spoke about how important it is to acknowledge the similarities, especially regarding how oppression operates and how the common condition of being oppressed is shared. The emerging stories revealed that despite differences and labeling, the underlying essence that remains very stable is the structure
of oppression itself. Kevin (Chinese), when asked about his friends, affirmed that they are mostly Chinese. He attributed it to the feeling of not having anything in common with other ethnoracial groups, and he called it “the barrier that one can’t go through”. Kevin elaborated:

Let’s say if I am Chinese, I watch Chinese TV and then Indian people will watch Indian television, you don't have a topic to talk about. We don’t talk about the same thing. Maybe we have similarities, but then we don’t really talk about similarities. … I think the human mind will only think of the differences instead of the similarities. So, it leads [down] the road where we just separate then... hang out with our own groups of people. - Kevin

These spatial boundaries generated by cultural differences cause tensions between ethnoracial minority groups and highlight the complexities of youth experiences and show that each ethnoracial group may differently activate and be impacted by racism. Sandy reflected that those divided arrangements at school serve to avoid the existing tension among students:

…because my school is small, the school population is more Asian. So, we are sort of spread out throughout the school and then you have the Browns which are like in the parking lot area, and they just stand there and block the vending machines. Yeah, we sort of avoid each other, just to avoid conflict. That’s what I feel. - Sandy

Also, the fact that youth do not talk about others’ oppression with other ethnoracial minority groups may indicate that youth learn about others’ oppression from the narrative created by the dominant group, which consequently not only fits youth into homogenous and fixed ethnoracial identities but also reinforces stereotypes and prejudices against the racialized groups. Betty shared an example in her brother’s school about how a South Asian group of students discriminated against one other Asian student.
.. my little brother goes to Meda [school] where there’s a lot of Indo-Canadian kids. So he feels comfortable because he’s Indo-Canadian, and they have a group of friends who are pretty much all Indo-Canadians, because you know, everyone hangs out with their own kind. And they have one Asian friend and they always used to pick on him and you know, push him around and stuff like that. - Betty

Youth discussed racism against them from other groups as being more visible and open than that of the racism from white peers. For example, Kevin and Wilson, when asked about their school encounters with racism, shared how they experienced racism coming from South Asian peers. As to the question of whether he felt racism against him now, Kevin began by saying “not really,” but then talked about incidents of being harassed by South Asian students (whom they would refer to as ‘brown students’). Kevin expressed his confusion:

I don’t know why, they just do it. And these brown people in my school would act as if they are Black (chuckles). I’ll be like, but you are brown (chuckles), and they’d act as if they are gangsters.

Kevin felt that these kids were trying to emulate the ‘gangster’ culture, “influenced by the media, like in hip-hop”. Wilson also shared his experiences of being violently approached by a mixed group of Indo-Canadian and White peers at school and in the mall. He described: “they come over and they will shout at me… for no reason. I guess, to show that they got power”.

Overall, youth talked about how the multicultural landscape of Canada does not foster connections between different ethnoracial groups. Participants reported lack of interaction and inter-existence with other ethnoracial groups. In the following section I will present stories revealing how racism operates in these locations.
4.2 Different forms of everyday racism: youth experiences while navigating daily interactions

In the previous section, I presented youth discussions on domains of racism on both national and local levels. Stories revealed the shortcomings of multicultural ideals that silence and confuse young people as they reported prevalence of racism in their everyday public spaces as well as their immediate environment, such as home and school. This section is concerned with stories of how racism operates in these different spaces through interactions with other people. Youth reported how they constantly experienced labeling and othering when navigating everyday relationships. The stereotypes against them generated cultural expectations and set up rules for normalizing behaviour and interaction patterns. Participants said they often feel stuck in certain boxes with fixed prescribed identities that they were constantly expected to perform. When negotiating these demands to fit in, placed on them by the dominant culture, youth emphasized how often these acts of othering remained unnoticed in everyday relationships, especially by the dominant group, but also by racialized individuals themselves as these acts become so normalized and routine.

The following themes will be discussed in this section that demonstrate how racism is activated and by whom: teachers’ role at school, making racism invisible, and using stereotypes to generate cultural expectations to behave in a certain way.

4.2.1 Institutional perpetuation of racism

A focal point in discussions on school-based racism was expressed through the role of teachers and school authorities. Youth almost unanimously reported their disappointment with school authorities for failing to tackle the issues of racism and teachers’ lack of responsibility in intervening and advocating for students of colour during racialized encounters.
Two participants, Eva (Black) and Lily (Chinese), discussed the inaction of teachers with disappointment and shared specific examples of how they experienced the silence of teachers as hurtful. Lily described how a teacher remained silent when one of the students was mocking someone else’s accent. She recalled in vivid detail how a white male student was laughing and loudly ridiculing a female Chinese student about a book she was reading, and “her face turned really red” from embarrassment while witnessing this incident. Lily empathized how the student felt “really bad,” but what she found most concerning was that the teacher did not call out the behaviour. She felt let down, saying that the teacher “should have definitely said something”, but “most importantly, the teacher didn’t even do anything about [the racist incident]”. Lily’s emotional tone while telling this story, and her emphasis on the disappointment regarding the teachers’ silence, revealed how the teacher’s apathy is a source of her vulnerability and appears to be even more hurtful than the racist behaviour itself. Students hoped to see teachers as a source of safety, and in Lily’s story, this sense of safety was compromised. Feeling protected at school may be experienced differently by students of colour and white students.

Eva shared her story of frustration when the school authority did not intervene on racist behaviour. A female student was swearing at Eva and taunting her. Eva slapped the other student, who continued to taunt her: “…go ahead, bitch, slap me again.” So, Eva did. The other student went to the principal, and the principal wanted to know who started the fight and if they were going to apologize to each other. Eva responded, “I am not going to apologize, because she started this.” What exacerbated Eva’s frustration was that when the principal stepped in to intervene, he wanted the students to apologize to each other. This distressed Eva, as the principal made it seem as if there was an equal balance of wrongdoing, when she felt that she was clearly attacked based on her race and was resisting and merely defending herself.
Eva later reflected on the same incident and recalled a similar story that happened to her sister when she was in a different elementary school. The story highlighted the same kind of disappointment she felt with the apathy of schoolteachers to address racism. In this incident, a female student called Eva’s sister the ‘n-word.’ “She got so mad, she beat the girl up.” When the principal came, Eva’s sister tried to explain what happened, “but he did not listen.” The principal called Eva’s mother, who refused to do anything about that because, according to Eva, she knew it wasn’t her sister’s fault, knowing that what prompted the violence was the racist slur and that the principal had refused to intervene on her sister’s behalf. Eva sympathized with her sister, saying that “you get violent when you have to defend yourself” and the principal didn’t say anything “because he was white”. The sister ended up switching to another school.

Both Lily and Eva emphasized that by not protecting students of colour by remaining silent and avoiding challenging racist behaviour, their teachers’ behaviours impacted them in a most hurtful way. In Lily’s example, the teacher ignored the racist incident by not reacting at all. For Eva, the school principal did not acknowledge that racism was at play in the conflict. In both cases, school teachers and principals, who have the responsibility to protect and guide students, let racially oppressed students down.

Other youth also talked about the responsibility of teachers in naming racism and educating on anti-racism. Participants spoke about the importance of anti-racism education at school and emphasized that, unfortunately, the common practice at school is to avoid talking about race and racism explicitly. Daisy summed up the group’s sentiments, suggesting that teachers need to be specific with examples when talking about racism: “Someone has to tell them: this is not right [slurs, inappropriate jokes, stereotyping]. You cannot say things like this. This hurts people”. She felt it should be part of the overall school curriculum, and not left to individual teachers to
decide if they feel like addressing these issues: “I think that’s what needs to be done. This should be done in the education system. Instead of covering it up. This is how racism happens.”

Wilson also stressed the need for change on a structural level and for teachers to take an active role in addressing racism by educating students, “saying something or showing some articles or clips”. Similarly, Kevin suggested that racism be addressed more critically and illustrated shortcomings associated with naming racism in schools. Although most participants said that racism is not a part of any discussion in the schools, Kevin gave an example of an exercise that his social science teacher facilitated to bring awareness to racism and initiate a discussion about it. The teacher asked all the students to sit down if they agreed with his question and stand up if they disagreed. To his first question ‘Are you racist?’ everyone remained standing. When he asked, ‘Do you think there is racism in this school?’, everybody sat down. Kevin noted the obvious contradiction as he pointed out that when everybody sat down for the second question, it was an acknowledgement that “they [students] are racist, everybody is racist, but then they are not admitting it”.

This example demonstrates the teacher’s efforts to acknowledge racism in school as well as to show students the contradictions and nuances therein. Kevin pointed out the reality of what was happening in schools: no one wants to call themselves a racist while students experience it at school. He brings up the importance of focusing on a discussion around the definitions of racism, not as attributes of “bad” people, but as a phenomenon, deeply embedded in our systems of white supremacy and that we all participate in it, sometimes without being aware of it.

The example of Celia’s teacher perfectly illustrates another attempt to address race. When describing her experiences of being a Black woman in Vancouver, Celia (Black) recalled her
interaction with the teacher in elementary school. She shared a memory of when the teacher asked Celia if she ever wanted to be white:

C: I’m in Coquitlam. In our elementary school there were no other Black kids and ... I had a teacher asking me, ‘oh, have you ever wished you were white before’?

(Group reacts: “WHAT?!” laughing with surprise)

C: And I was like, ‘No!’ I was so confused, because I guess she just thought because I was the only black kid, maybe kids teased me or I guess she was just trying to see if I had ever been teased about it or anything. And I just, I never experienced racism growing up, so... I guess it’s a good thing. Yeah.

R: Well, how did you understand the teacher’s question? Why had she wanted to ask you a question like that?

C: Hmm, I don’t know. At the time, I was really confused, but I think she was just trying to see if there was an issue like that, to see if anything had ever happened, just… I guess, yeah.

The question “have you ever wished you were white before?” prompted intense reactions from the rest of the participants of the focus group. They expressed a surprise in unison of “WHAAT?!”, which only emphasized how bizarre this question was. Arial thought the question was rude and that the teacher should have been more direct and just asked if she had experienced racism. “Don’t be like, ‘Oh, you wished you were white!’” [group laughs]. The group agreed, though, that the question might have been sincere, but awkwardly expressed. Even if they offered positive explanations underlying the teacher’s intentions, they all agreed that the teacher seemed to be ignorant of the offensive or even manipulative nature of the question.
The teacher may have thought the question was an empathetic one, or she may have thought that she was relating with the student, and in her mind, she may have intuitively felt that she knew the answer; that the answer would be ‘yes, I have wished I were white’, because why wouldn’t a Black kid wish they were white sometimes? Perhaps because the teacher thought there's so much to envy about being white, or she was aware of the many benefits of “being white”.

When trying to make sense of the event, Celia and other participants offered their versions of what may have been the teacher’s intentions. For example, she may have wanted to ask if the student had ever experienced discrimination based on the colour of her skin. In the youth’s minds, these types of inquiries would make more sense and would validate them as a person of colour living in a racist society. It is not clear how old Celia was at the time of this interaction; however, knowing that it occurred in elementary school, the teacher may have thought she used age-appropriate language to explore the issue of race. In fact, that may be precisely why Celia remembered this incident so vividly, because it actually provided her space to think about herself in racialized terms. It is possible that, in elementary school, the teacher was not sure if young Celia would have understood this concept of racism but wanted to open up a conversation.

While students hoped that the teacher’s intentions were a basis of solidarity, not merely sympathy, it seems that the teacher felt or constructed the story of Celia’s blackness as a deficit, such as seeing her as “less fortunate” or “lacking”. From that angle, her question is essentially an expression of sympathy demonstrated in a normalized manner; sympathy that is rooted in the ideas of victimizing people of colour, or white superiority. The teacher’s question assumes that the student may have been feeling in some way ashamed of her identity, but because the question may have been asked with good intentions, sincerely, and perhaps caringly, this may have led the
student to wonder about what was happening in the moment. Contrary to the teacher’s possible assumptions, the excerpt demonstrates Celia’s and other youth’s pride in being Black. Pride and celebration of one’s own ethnoracial group may have been overlooked by the teacher. In the next chapter of the findings, I will examine how pride in asserting one’s ethnicity serves as a tool to cope with racial trauma.

4.2.2 Making racism invisible as a way to minimize its impact

Participants shared their understanding of the issue of (in)visibility of racism and how they, as a racialized minority, experience it. They reflected on how they face boundaries set up between the dominant group and “the other” that are often visible only to the minority group, but not the majority. Youth talked about how racism, when it’s not acknowledged, tends to make them doubt their own experience and minimize the hurtful impact that it has on them. Sandy described, how she was constantly reminded of her marked racialized identity and faced expectations to fit that ascribed identity, deeply ingrained in the behaviour and reactions towards her from others.

I think it’s always the minority group, people from the minority group will realize the obvious thing that the white people do. As the Black guy in the video said, this woman might not realize what she does, but it’s so obvious to him. These things are always obvious to the minority group, but not the majority group. – Sandy.

Frank gave an example of how, for him, othering occurs every day and how his racialized interactions with people around him show up as ‘normalized’ experiences that are so embedded in the behaviour and noticed only by the one who is being judged. Often, these encounters are discussed by youth as covert forms of discrimination. The following excerpt exemplifies how Frank is reminded of his ethnoracial identity by the nuanced reactions of other people, expressed
in a subtle body language. He told a story about how his close friends introduced him to other people in a gathering and how he was reminded again that he is being seen as ‘the other’:

I see when my [close] friends forget about my skin colour. They introduce me to somebody, and you see their face light up when they hear my name, but at the same time, you see, it’s funny, they balance, like Ying and Yang. ‘He is Black’, [and the friend didn’t mention that], you can see all the thoughts that are flashing in their heads. - Frank

Several participants pointed out that only through discussions with other ethnoracial groups were they able to name and articulate that what they experienced was, in fact, racism (even though they could always feel that it was). Participants reflected that while talking with their peers who are racialized, they were able to see more clearly how racism operates in everyday circumstances for others - especially when those incidents appeared as underlying, not easily detectible racist attacks. Yvonne said,

Even if a lot of people, a lot of youth these days say, ‘oh you know racism does not exist as much anymore, it’s not as big of a deal these days, it’s not as prevalent’, I don’t know if that’s necessarily true. Because when I came into the discussion [research], I thought, ‘oh, that does not happen to me that much’. You don’t think about it, but as soon as you start hearing about it, people start thinking, ‘oh, wait, I did go through something similar like this’. So that just shows that everyone I know has been a victim of racism, and also subconsciously we may have been racists through our assumptions of other people. - Yvonne

This example reveals several important points. It shows that oppression is often hidden, and racialized individuals may not notice it. It also demonstrates how racialized persons may be conditioned to internalize that oppression and may not be able to recognize it when it occurs.
Therefore, when racism is being named and discussed by others, it plays a powerful role in making racism come to the surface and become visible. By saying that many young people overall believe that racism is “not as big of a deal these days”, Yvonne revealed how the dominant belief among youth is that racism is just a matter of the past.

Most participants denied facing direct racism themselves on a daily basis and tended, rather, to call the racist instances a joke, a misunderstanding, or an individual prejudice. Sometimes youth would find excuses on behalf of the person that is being racist or diminish the effects of racism on themselves. This was evident in youth reflections about jokes as a strategy of racism. Youth stories revealed how joking conceals racism by attempting to hide the intent. As jokes make racism invisible, youth tend to internalize or trivialize their experience of racism. Like Wilson shared:

Sometimes they say it as a joke … But then I think when they say that [racist joke], they don’t say it in front of people, because if they [racialized people] hear, then they would get angry for sure. So, they shouldn’t say that. …

Usually when people say it, like as a joke, they don’t bring it too far, right. They just keep it small. Sometimes they might say, ‘Oh, Chinese people are really smart’ or they say, ‘Chinese people are really filthy”, so... I just take it as a joke.” - Wilson

Frank also reflected on how jokes are inherently seen as innocent and one may think that they cannot do any harm. Jokes “allow” people, according to him, to “say something that can be misconstrued as completely racist”, but then justify it as “they are just making a joke”.

This kind of joking language seems to be normalized to such an extent that youth may not even notice the ways in which these hierarchical structures of power in the expressions of joking is constructed on how it operates. In other words, such language and behaviour appear as normal
when they align with so-called ‘universal values’. It also implies the belief that racism is no longer prevalent or that being racist is attributed only to those other ‘bad’ people, so a ‘nice person’ can joke about it because, by default, he is not racist. Jokes about racialized groups are often normalized and perceived as innocent behaviours with no real impact or consequences for the targeted individuals. However, there is a disconnect between the intention of the joke, which is often believed to be harmless humour, and its actual impact on the individual. The impact can be far-reaching and detrimental despite the lack of bad intentions. Arial shared a story about her neighbours who said insulting things about her family, which they classified as ‘joking’, too:

Arial: They would say, ‘Oh, you know, we didn’t know what kind of Black people you were, we didn’t know if you guys would be having parties every weekend or… if you guys will be getting drunk or that kind of things, you know...

R.: Did they say those things to you?

Arial: Yes, they did, but they said it in a joking way. But there’s a lot of truth to every joke, you know.

Jessica reflected on how these individualized instances of racist joking are perpetuated in the media when “they are kind of making fun of you, but you can’t really say anything about it ‘cos it’s a comedy…” I notice that youth faced an expectation to not take these portrayals seriously as if these jokes were happening in a vacuum and had nothing to do with their reality.

Regarding racist representations in media, Chinese youth talked about being presented as the objects of humour. As Catherine shared, when they appear in pop music or the visual media scene, Chinese are caricatured for their accent. Jessica mentioned comedians on a YouTube channel saying that the idea of the episodes is to imitate different cultures and that it “really hits [her] sometimes when they start talking in an accent like that [Chinese]”. She continued,
referring to her brother watching these online videos: “you know they’re [content in the video] making fun of you, but you can’t really say anything about it ‘cos it’s a comedy. My mother really does not like it, that’s for sure.” Youth seemed to be facing a certain cultural pressure to ‘be a good sport’ and to be able to ‘take a joke.’ In turn, to speak up about racist comedy is to risk being accused of being ‘humourless’, which may be a particularly harsh admonishment in mainstream culture and among peers.

Arial articulated her construction of racism while comparing it to prejudice. Her reluctance to name racism may show how she is unconsciously meeting cultural norms that deny the existence of racism. She shared that “I haven’t really experienced a lot of racism, maybe prejudice, but not so much racism.” Arial revealed her understanding about the difference between prejudice and racism, saying that no one ever told her “‘I don’t like you because you are Black’”. But she indicated that she experienced ‘prejudice’ and explained that: “Prejudice is just what people have… in their minds because of our skin colour. My skin colour, I have experienced that”. Since previous youth stories indicated that racism mostly manifests in covert forms, perhaps it is often hard to pinpoint if it is racism or prejudice in a given situation.

In respect to naming racism, Nelson, for example, called these encounters “misunderstandings”, defining them as individual instances that occur under unfortunate circumstances, ones that can easily be avoided with good individual intentions. Nelson shared a thought that Canadian culture would stereotype Chinese people because of the lack of understanding that Chinese people “are capable of doing something else probably good for the society”.

I observed that these strategies, that make racism less visible, not only play down youth experiences as less important, but also shape their own interpretations of racist events in a way
that reflects society’s expectations. This cycle seems to be reinforcing the (in)visibility of racism and the rules around it.

4.2.3 ‘Angry Black Person’ stereotype and cultural expectation to smile

Participants highlighted that society has certain kinds of biases against different ethnoracial groups. Youth shared their understanding of how these biases lead to certain expectations about typical proper behaviour of ethnoracial groups. They talked about how society might have expected them, as a visible minority, to respond to others in the public arena. For example, a Black man or woman is seen as angry and aggressive, which leads to cultural expectations for them to smile or show their good intentions in other ways. This dynamic is reflected in how some youth commented on what the Black actor could have done in the elevator scenario to make the white woman feel more comfortable, like Nelson said:

I want to go back to your question that for the elevator, if I were in an elevator like this, one more thing [to do] is smile and talk, say ‘good morning’, ‘sorry’, whatever. To talk [about] something not quite important, they would lower the barrier between each other. – Nelson.

Sandy agreed with Nelson’s approach, saying that “one person has to be the bigger person, right, and kind of just be… nice, even a gesture just to smile or anything like that”. The fact that most participants were suggesting this type of response illustrates the extent to which the thinking of the dominant culture has embedded itself into their own. In other words, there was the sense among youth that the man could have “comforted” the woman by smiling at her or offering some other kind of soothing gesture, as if it is incumbent upon racialized people to calm the unreasonable fears of white people. Yvonne shared:
I honestly think even the person, even if you are the minority, for example, he could have easily walked in there and smiled as well, right. And just a simple smile, or like a wave can make you feel that much more comfortable where you are not as scared or you don’t think you are better than that person. When I walk into an elevator, I smile at the person. – Yvonne.

In response, as a Black woman who has been stereotyped as angry and unapproachable, Eva picked up on the “smiling” idea and shared her own experience with smiling. People thought she should smile more in the hallway at school, and she did not hesitate to say that she would smile if she felt like it, otherwise she doesn’t need to. As she says: “[people] will start to classify myself … but I’m just like… I smile when I feel like smiling”. At this point Eva shared the incident that was described before, when her lack of a smile led to another student calling her racist names and swearing at her, which resulted in Eva slapping the other student. Similarly to Eva’s experience, Kate challenged the expectation for her to smile and talked about a time when she received racist comments in the mall, which she attributed to her having a non-smiling facial expression and listening to her music with her headphones without paying too much attention to her surroundings.

This expectation of dominant groups to receive an affirming, comforting smile may be the consequence of stereotypes surrounding the Black woman, who is perceived as threatening when she is not smiling. Therefore, they are expected to soften down, with smiling being one of the assumptions. To illustrate, Rebecca articulated stereotypes that she faced:

If someone sees a Black woman… they expect to see a very angry, hurt woman who’s been through a lot and ‘get out of my way, I was gonna kill you’ kind of thing. So that’s what
people expect to see. So I think, we face stereotypes that are more like that. They expect you to be crazy and loud or blah, blah, blah, and some of us are, right?

Knowing this, the Black woman becomes aware of how she is perceived based on the dominant discourse, as she is reminded of it over and over again. Arial reflected on her experiences with the intersection of gender and race that classify the Black woman as having “superpower”. She tells a story about how at her own birthday party, she was described by her childhood friend as a strong fearless Black girlfriend.

She is Chinese and she was at my birthday party. They [other friends] were saying stuff about me, like facial features or whatever, and she comes up [to us] and says: ‘yeah, when I became friends with Arial, I felt fearless, you know. I have a Black friend, you know, I could go… I could do anything’. And it was funny… I know she didn’t mean any harm by it, but there is that stereotype of us as we can get our way, we’ll do anything, if it needs to be aggressive or violent, we would get our way, right. I am not going to lie, sometimes I can be like her, right? – Arial

Arial elaborated further on how a Black woman carries a “superwoman” stereotype and highlighted the awareness on how dominant culture sees Black bodies as threatening, and how that view eventually becomes the norm:

Just like that elevator. I think as a Black person you know what to expect. I don’t know what I would be like, being of another race, but I know that as a Black person … you see what’s on the media, you see how people are portrayed, …so, this is what people actually think of us. We might do our best to break down those barriers, and to start afresh, right. - Arial
Again, this example shows how systemic racism operates and turns into an internalized belief within both the dominant and oppressed group. The reactions that are elicited when someone gets triggered by a Black woman not smiling indicate the construction of her as threatening, while it also expresses the expectation for her to “take care” of that feeling of unsafety that she is accused of having created – this burden of ensuring the comfort of the dominant group is also constructed by the dominant cultural standard imposed upon Black women.

The interpretations of the elevator scene contained information not only about youth’s experiences of racism, but they also demonstrated how racial identities are constructed in respect to the expectations for certain racial groups in North American society, specifically and mostly in Western Canada, from the perspective of Vancouver youth. The examples above articulate how feeling uncomfortable when a Black man enters an elevator is normalized; it is more normalized than coming into the elevator and seeing the white woman, who is not smiling and appears scared. Based on these stereotypes, the dominant group expects the Black person to smile and make them comfortable. In other words, they expect the oppressed group to prove to them that they are good people and worthy of their trust.

### 4.2.4 Stereotypes about innocence, guilt and the expectation to minimize the threat

As an extension of the previously discussed stereotype portraying a Black person as angry, youth highlighted how society constructs the white body as innocent, vulnerable and needing protection, while the body of colour, on the other hand, carries a ‘presumption of guilt’. These constructions lead to the expectation for a racialized person to prove their innocence and be responsible for taking care of that “misunderstanding” or “barrier” that is created by them merely entering certain spaces. The stereotype of being violent and the expectation to minimize the perceived threat was reflected in youth’s perceptions of media as a space for racism, which
perpetuates these negative stereotypes of Black people. Youth relayed how the stereotypes of their ethnic groups in the media have an immediate effect on their lives and how people gain knowledge about racialized groups from what they see on TV, social media or in music – narratives that are constructed by the dominant discourse.

Specifically, youth articulated the power that media holds, how easily it can be accessed by groups of people from anywhere, and, of course, how content is managed and controlled by the dominant framework that privileges white people’s knowledge and how subsequently oppressed groups are impacted by these representations. Sunny (Black) felt that news media was a main perpetrator of stereotypes of violence and described how the dominant narrative about the bodies of Black males is being constructed to depict them as threatening:

…everyone is in their home and we are watching TV, we listen to this kind of music, right? That’s why we got to be learning more of this stuff when we go to school. That’s what we got to be learning more from friends. So personally, I think it has to do with movies and again with the music and also what we see on TV. For example, on the news, I think she [another participant] kind of mentioned how if something happens here that has to do with another race [a race other than Black], you mostly won’t hear about it, but if it has to do with the Black male, you definitely hear about it. That’s what really puts it out there… if I see more and more and more of these stories about this Black person did this, this Black person did that and that’s just what I know… - Sunny

This quote showed how Sunny experienced the dominant culture constructing Black bodies, how these constructions have become a part of everyday life, and how the normalization of these categories results in them becoming almost invisible to the dominant society. A narrative that the Black body threatens the white body is created and, in Sunny’s words, this is how this story
becomes a part of our psyche. While “everyone is in their home and we [are] watching TV”, he said - what we see there is later reconstructed and reinforced through various different systems, such as school, work, and public places. Eventually, this constructed narrative becomes the norm, and its flaws are difficult to notice.

The particular way that media perpetuates racism, in the view of all the participants, is that for some people media is their single source of information, which people use to draw conclusions about racialized groups, to determine safety and threat, to form stereotypes, or to make decisions about how to engage and experience racialized bodies. In the following excerpt, Arial talked about how even her close friends translate the media image of her into their relationship.

I just kind of blame the media because whenever media [perpetuate] stereotypes about Black females, Black males, I feel like they [people] try to push it up against us even though we don’t fit those stereotypes. So, it goes to the extreme, where it’s your friends who start applying it to you. It’s like, ‘Oh, you know what, I’ve seen a Black girl in the video, you know, why don’t you wear those kinds of outfits or why don’t you do your hair like that, why do you listen to rock music, why do you make good grades in school?’ - Arial

Media perpetuates the stereotype of the Black body as deviant, which in turn generates an expectation of them to adjust their behaviour in a predominantly white society. These adjustments must align with the values, beliefs and expectations of the dominant culture. In my next chapter, I will discuss how these processes of adjustment show up in the behaviour of racialized communities through the adaptation of coping strategies, where I talk about how youth dealt with racism and the intentions behind their responses.
Black people are overrepresented in crime-related instances, in Celia’s words, through the media narrative indicating that “all Black people are robbers”, making them look violent and aggressive:

We hear a lot about Black males in the news world, you know, gunning women down, grabbing purses and such…, so then, of course, …even if they don’t want to have that kind of mindset towards Black people, that fear would strike up something within them and you know, they tend to act the ways that they’ve been told. – Arial

This was highlighted in Arial’s experience about how the aforementioned stereotypes impacted her family when they moved to a new neighbourhood in Vancouver and how they were not welcomed there; she said: “I don’t think they [neighbours] wanted Black people in the neighbourhood at all because they thought that would bring down the status of the neighbourhood”. Later, she gave another example of how her white neighbour avoided all kinds of contact with Arial’s family as he was “a little bit intimidated and scared”, and she did not know why. Similarly, Kate shared how she experienced being portrayed as deviant and was assigned a label of “guilty” to her while shopping. The staff at the store looked at her and followed her around, which would happen in those instances when she spent a longer time in the store browsing for the right item. She explained: “I walk in there with intention, but that doesn’t mean I wanna sneak up and steal one of your clothes and stuff”.

When discussing how they experienced racial stereotypes in their daily encounters, youth mentioned rap music, especially songs containing violent themes, as being potentially harmful to the image of Black people. Frank described how the dominant culture uses rap music inappropriately. He began by noting that there is a small Black community in Vancouver. He then said how he knew of a Black friend from Colombia who was working as a background actor
in the film industry. Sunny told the story how “people on set would call him [Sunny’s peer] “n***” [rap language]”, a term he had never heard. When this was overheard by another Black person on set, it led to a heated argument that almost turned into a fight. The person using the language tried to justify it by saying “rap songs use that word – it’s all good”. Frank was adamant: “No, it’s not all good. First off, you don’t have the right to say that word, and just because you were hearing it in a rap song, it does not give you a right to say it.”

Participants reflected on how media portrayals of their culture of origin effected how they are seen by others. Celia talked about her interactions with people who are influenced by how they think she should be treated based on characters portrayed on TV. She described how she is directly impacted by media representations of people who look like her as she talked about music as a site of violence.

Sometimes rap music [communicates] that you can treat women a certain way and sometimes you get approached that way, too, right, and I don’t think that’s fair. And because of my race and because I’m a girl, then they think they can treat me that way, so I think that’s violence towards me in a certain way. – Celia

Other participants, who were Black, discussed experienced racism through music as well. Black women were especially concerned about what rappers were singing about and how it may be used against them in a violent way. Rebecca talked about how rap music affects her describing how media culture portrays Black women and what consequences it may have for their everyday life.

…when people, hear those kinds of things and they associate rap with Black people, … they think that…, okay, that means Black people are violent, that means I can treat you a certain way, I can talk to you this way because you are a Black woman. So, for me … that
aspect of hip hop is a very small minority, but that small minority of hip hop reminds me of violence and that’s how I relate to violence, gun violence, drugs, whatever, that’s what it reminds me of - racist violence. – Rebecca

Kate shed light on how the media assigns value to each racial group by constructing innocence and guilt – this is done by showing bodies of Black and Mexican heritage individuals as deviant, while they do not find their lives worthy of being searched for or protected. As in this example:

…you would hear a lot about a Black person doing [bad] stuff, well in the States, but if a white person were to rob a bank…, you wouldn’t hear it as much as when a Black person does it, or a Mexican person in the States, you know. But here or in the States, …you’re gonna notice, if an Indian person did that. But if their child gets lost, they won’t show it [in the news], will they? No! I’ve rarely seen that, or if we have a missing person, Indian [Indigenous], you know, it’s a different society, that doesn’t get covered in the media, but if it was to be the main race, you know, yes, it’s worth it, you know, I don’t know. – Kate

Kate’s reflection is an interesting and important reference to the idea of “innocence”; a crucial question then arises: Who is considered innocent in North American society? As Jessica described, while Black people are portrayed as deviant, “angels are always portrayed by white females, and … because they sort of convey that pure... quality of them.” Subsequently, these stereotypes generate social norms, tell what danger is and, in turn, guide behaviour on how to keep oneself safe. Arial pointed out that media tells people what to do when a Black male enters an elevator and defines what safety is. She said: “they [white people] will act accordingly to try to keep themselves safe, they will take safety precautions, as do all of us, right.” This example of media representations demonstrates how danger and safety are shaped and associated with a
certain group, placing whiteness in the sphere of safety (a pure, white, female, angel), and places the Black woman and blackness to an opposite end, that is associated with danger.

The experience of facing the expectation to make white people comfortable was shared by Nelson. He recounted his story of when he talked to his mom in Cantonese at the hospital and a white woman appeared to be dissatisfied that they were not conversing in English. He said that perhaps, this was because she could not understand them. Nelson explained that he was discussing his mom’s heart attack with her and issues around her care. He wondered, was the white woman wondering if they would somehow harm her? He said his mother’s care was nobody’s business who was around them.

They stereotype... they will stare at you and try to figure out what you want to do. So, we are kind of under monitor. Unfortunately, they [white people] have to bring up the issue, so we can explain. But sometimes you can’t [explain yourself] because they do not tell us [what is the problem]. So, communication is all that we need to resolve the misunderstanding there. – Nelson

Nelson explained how he feels monitored by white people. In this instance, Chinese people are perceived by a white person with suspicion, as if they are doing something wrong, as their actions have the consequence of making a white person uncomfortable when they are not able to understand the words people are saying to each other. This is similar to Jessica’s reflection on how white people say that “English is a global language”, and when they hear people conversing in another language, they “tend to think that people are talking about each other”. It seems that ethnoracial youth navigated the expectations that were placed on them and putting them in the position of coming up short in terms of fitting into the normative English-speaking white
identity. Therefore, they experienced demands to adjust themselves to avoid being a threat to a white person.

4.2.5 **Stereotypes about inferiority and demands to adhere to dominant cultural norms**

Youth shared stories of times when they were classified as culturally inferior, undeveloped, simple-minded, uncivilized, or otherwise deficient – in other words, as simply lacking *something*. Youth talked about how the dominant culture constructs stereotypes, marking the belief that people of colour are not intellectually equal to white people. They discussed how these biases lead to certain expectations about proper behaviour, such as learning appropriate manners and fitting into dominant norms. Their stories reflected how different reasons of inferiority are used to stereotype different groups. Black youth discussed how they were often viewed through the lens of how Africa is seen in the world. For example, stereotypes portrayed in the media show Africa as a poor “country”; the ideas based on white superiority ideology that presents one’s group as inferior. Kate reflected:

> There’s a lot of poverty. Yes, we know Africa is still struggling, but there’s no way you go where there’s no poverty. Go to the States, Atlanta, go to downtown, you see people there and you know, it’s there. We are trying to extinguish it, but still, you know, it’s there. - Kate

In addition to being portrayed as violent, Black participants talked about portrayals of them as poor. For example, Africa is often shown as poor and homogenous, which translates into people’s knowledge and treatment of Black people. Arial talked about places in Africa that aren’t poor and how these are never presented in the media. Not only does she feel her identity was unsuccessfully defined by her country of origin, but also that her country of origin was misrepresented as well. This demonstrates that African-Canadian narratives do not participate in
creating the narratives that make up the content of mainstream media. Arial talked about how the media doesn’t do a good job of portraying “the good side of Black people” or their origins from Africa. She felt that the continent is usually portrayed as poor and run down, but that she comes from a wealthier part of Africa that is fertile and green and beautiful. “But we never get to see that, right?” This leads to pre-conceived ideas of Africans, and she talked about how she would always hear jokes about ‘poor Africans’, their language and the assumption that they all share the same language. Given the prevalence of the negative and incomplete portrayals, she was understanding of why people held these views, which speaks to a kind of resigned acceptance. Arial concluded, “I can’t blame them because it’s not really their fault.”

Similarly, South Asian youth also shared facing stereotypes of being poor. Daisy shared how her culture is seen as “always taking”, “always asking for free things, or “being cheap”. Chinese students consistently reported facing stereotypes of being seen as lacking manners, being loud, less intelligent because of accented English, and, at the same time, as being successful in academic subjects, such as math and science. For example, Ada (Chinese) described her experience while waiting for the bus and how she faced the stereotype that all Asian people “do not like to wait in queues and they just go on the moment the door is thrust open”. She said:

…it’s definitely a stereotype that I think gets imposed on a lot of people. I mean Asia is so diverse and people automatically assume that I’m like, you know, from Asia and we’ve never been educated or something and never had social norms and stuff.

Sandy referred to facing stereotypes of Chinese being ‘very loud’ and explained why she thinks that is a characteristic of people from her country. She agreed that “some middle-age Chinese people do talk very loud”:
We talk loud in our own country because there are too many people around us. If you don’t talk loudly, you can’t hear, right, so, we talk loud just because of that. When we are in a restaurant or in other places, you have to talk loud; you have to, so everybody talks loud and the whole place is loud, it’s noisy (chuckles). But we have to learn to tune it down when we are here because it’s not too crowded here (chuckles), so yeah… - Sandy

It seems that youth have an awareness of the stereotypes that have been imposed upon them by the dominant white culture, and as indicated by Sandy’s story, the demand to adjust their behaviour to conform to the dominant society to avoid perpetuating the stereotype further. As she indicated, “even my mom talks very loud on the bus, and I would shh her (chuckles)”. These stories illustrated how stereotypes impacted youth on a daily basis and how they are facing an expectation to assimilate and follow the dominant social expectations in order to ‘fit in’.

Chinese youth also described how often they were stereotyped as deficient and less intelligent, based on their English language skills. Like Wilson said,

When they speak English to my mom… her English isn’t that great, but it seems like when they talk, it seems like they are talking as if she doesn’t know anything. – Wilson.

Language, as a cultural standard, functions as a form of social control and method of inclusion and exclusion. Jessica reflected on how she faced expectations to use the English language instead of speaking Chinese.

I remember when I was taught at a young age that you should always speak in English in school; I hated that at first because I wasn’t really used to English at that time. But I guess, I adjusted to it because you get exposed to a lot of English; you communicate in it and then that language just kicks in and you can fluently speak it and then understand it…
For Chinese Canadian youth, language is a form of separation, not only from the dominant group, but also from their peers with whom they share an ethnoracial identity. Kevin discussed how the two groups were delineated within the group of Chinese youth: one, Chinese people who were born in Canada or knew the English language well, the other, people who were new immigrants and struggled with English. When the English language is the established norm, it serves as a tool of normalization, control and distribution. Youth experienced language as a tool to classify those who could speak it and therefore being a part of the dominant group, and those who could not.

Similarly, Arial reported how she experienced assumptions about her native language being less developed and more primitive.

And they [people of dominant culture] will try to make fun of my language, even though I’ve never spoken it in front of them, they automatically assume that my language has clicking sounds and ‘un un un’, those kinds of things. But that’s not, that’s not me. That’s not where I come from. We don’t even have that kind of language or dialect in my original home. That’s South Africa. - Arial

Categorization based on language, especially one’s accent, emerged as a common theme among Chinese participants, especially as a source of discrimination, othering and segregation. Sandy articulated that “language is a really big thing that makes the boundary like even more serious”. Likewise, Jessica raised a point about Chinese people being ridiculed for their accent. She then added:

I think language plays a big role in how we communicate and Chinese people tend to be kind of pushed down by the white people because their English may not be as good or their
vocabulary is limited. And I mean, people sort of bully you because Chinese people cannot
react back and I think that is a big problem. - Jessica

Accented English becomes marginalized, as it sends a message that those who cannot speak
fluently remain on the margin, and according to participants, this disadvantages Chinese
Canadian youth. This demonstrates hierarchies grounded in fluent non-accented English as a
standard and therefore a marker of competence and perhaps intelligence.

When it comes to the stereotypes of inferiority, Nelson shared how he experienced Chinese
people being labeled as hard-working and occupying low skilled jobs, such as working in the
laundromat or a restaurant. Another stereotype that Chinese students reported is the assumption
of their being academically strong in math and science or, as Catherine said, being seen as
capable only for schoolwork:

So, we are sort of a stereotype within a stereotype, … like we are the ones that study more
or that do better in school. I know there are people in Mini School that study really, really
hard and they do really, really well in school, but they’re just sort of enforcing the
stereotype that regular people see in us. - Catherine

Wilson added:

So, a lot of the people they think, or they’d say, ‘oh, you are Chinese or you Asians are
really smart, but hm… it’s not, it’s not all that true or it’s just that most of us just work
harder, but yeah. – Wilson

Catherine also discussed how, apart from being strong in academics, Chinese are made invisible
in the media, film and music scene: “I don’t recall anyone with Asian roots that sings English
music, so we’re sort of invisible in that sort of sense”. They are, she says, featured in their own
movies or their “own medias”: “we all sort of have our own medias, yeah, so it’s hard to get into
each other’s category, I suppose, but … the media we see here is the Caucasian or the white music”:

We’re just not there in the media. We’re not there. You turn on the TV, what Asian is there? There’s no Asian, it’s just white, Black, and maybe there’s a random Chinese person that’s out. - Catherine

In contrast to Chinese students being rendered as academically strong, Black and South Asian youth reported being seen as lacking in academics. Arial recounted how even her friends were surprised that she got good grades in school.

I’m supposed to be stupid, right, I don’t understand that. So, there was an incident in school. … I got a good grade in science, my friend, she was Black, she comes up to me, she’s like oh, I didn’t know Black people get an A in science, right. – Arial (Group laughing: Oh! Hahahaha...)

The stereotype of not being smart was discussed as the experience of South Asian youth as well. Betty told the story of how her social science teacher assumed that because she came from a specific elementary school where all Punjabi kids go, her academic performance would not be good:

I am from a region of Punjabi and I come from this elementary school Moberly, and everyone who goes to Moberly is Punjabi. So, I guess he just assumed that I am dumb or something, that’s what he just assumed. All teachers assume that, they don’t talk about it, but it is racist. – Betty

This example epitomizes how labels are given and how dominant constructs of certain groups demonstrate what every group is capable of. Furthermore, with regard to labels, there are none more powerful than names. A common thread among Asian students was to adopt a name easy
for the predominant group to pronounce. I will be discussing the name change in the next chapter as a strategy that youth utilized to prevent experiences of racism towards them.

4.3 Summary

This chapter primarily addressed the first part of the research question concerned with vulnerabilities and encounters of racism that youth experienced on a daily basis. I have attempted to provide a picture of the context in which racism occurs.

This chapter was divided into two main sections. The findings in the first section highlight participants’ perceptions of how the ideas of multiculturalism often contradicted their lived experiences. Participants’ reports indicated the shortcomings of official multiculturalism and how relevant it is to their lived experiences. The limitations of multiculturalism showed up through the nuanced forms of racism and perpetuated further ethnoracial divisions within their immediate environment. In the second section, I highlighted participants’ accounts of how racism is activated in the previously discussed domains. The findings of this section revealed various forms of everyday racism that often manifest themselves in subtle ways, leading to a false illusion that racism is non-existent. Participants discussed how institutions perpetuate racism, the challenges posed by its (in)visibility, and the ways in which stereotypes about different ethnoracial groups generate cultural norms and expectations. This section primarily focuses on how racism is encountered in the daily interactions of young people. The narratives shared revealed how different ethnoracial groups are subjected to different stereotypes that label them as deviant or invisible.

In summary, the findings of this chapter highlighted how racism emerges in Canadian multicultural society. This understanding of multiculturalism, led by the federal policy that dictates principles on how different ethnoracial groups live together, is central for critically
examining how these standards impact the lives of ethnoracial minority groups, both in positive and in negative ways.

In the following chapter, I further tackle how these tensions and contradictions show up in and shape the daily lives of young people. I do that by examining the ways that youth navigate these spaces and respond to racist encounters. Specifically, I show how they respond to and make sense of racist experiences discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 5: Youth-identified responses to racism

This chapter is the second findings chapter in which youth responses to everyday racism are discussed. It builds on the previous findings chapter that demonstrated how racism showed up in routine and mundane experiences, embedding itself into the lives of youth becoming an everyday ‘normal’, yet posing harm that is not always readily visible. While calling out a racist encounter was not always an option, the overarching theme concerning youth responses to racism was containment. This showed up as youth’s attempts and felt responsibility to manage their emotions internally to keep the harmful impacts of racism under control and, if at all possible, to avoid racist conflict.

In the first section (5.1) I discuss the reasons behind the decisions of youth to contain their emotions and to not actively engage in addressing racism directly. In the second section (5.2.) I identify external tactics through which youth engaged with the unjust world around them to mitigate pain, gain some control and increase safety. In the third section (5.3.) I report further on containment strategies that youth utilized to ameliorate the effects of racism on their well-being as they focused on internal resources to manage their emotions.

5.1 Motivations to avoid confronting racism

While some youth shared stories of how they addressed racism directly, all of them identified a number of concerns with calling out racism. They demonstrated why containing their thoughts and feelings, as well as keeping their behaviour under control, may be the most appropriate response. Choosing confrontation in racist situations usually proved to be a negative course of action due to the ramifications it had on the safety and well-being of youth. Youth revealed that they constantly had to plan several steps ahead for different scenarios, calculating the various outcomes that may ensue during racist encounters. In this section, I present
participants’ motivations for their decisions regarding if and how to address a racist attack. Three major reasons that youth used to explain their actions were related to the necessity for second-guessing acts of racism, fear of reinforcing stereotypes, and fear of creating a feedback loop.

5.1.1 The toll of second-guessing acts of racism

The most common reason youth hesitated to call out racist behaviour directly stemmed from their desire to avoid the prevalent outcome of naming racism for what it is. Particularly, youth felt ambivalence about addressing subtle forms of racism because they worried that their experiences of being invisible to white people may not be perceived as real. In this part of my thesis, I discuss why youth, before initiating any engagement, first had to make sure that the situation was an obvious racist incident and how it led them to second guess their own experiences when they approached the situation from the white person’s perspective.

In their perception of racism in Vancouver, youth appeared puzzled. On the one hand, they said that racism here was not that prevalent, especially given the ethnoracial diversity in Vancouver, while, on the other hand, they described everyday examples of significant struggles associated with being a racialized person in Vancouver. Ultimately, it seemed that not only were the romanticized multicultural ideals that appear in the dominant messages of inclusion and diversity unhelpful, but they also made it difficult for them even to approach the subject of racism.

Discussing their struggle to pinpoint examples of why it feels that racism does exist, youth reflected on the overall cultural belief present in North America, particularly Canada, that racism is a concern of the past and that racist issues have little relevance to Vancouver because of its ethnoracial composition. Youth stories were coloured by this dominant theme of a particular confusion when they compared living in Canada versus the United States: Canada appeared
multicultural with inclusion and diversity policies in place, and yet they felt more racialized here than in the US, with examples discussed at length in the previous chapter.

This confusion was evident in the many pauses and unfinished sentences at moments when youth tried to make sense of racism in Vancouver. They would often discuss situations with laughter, which may have served as a distraction from the severity of the racist event, or as an indicator of how common and ingrained these incidents were. The youth narratives sometimes contained contradictions as they started with describing Vancouver’s climate of racism as being “not too bad” or “getting better”. And a few lines later, they would recall a racist incident that clearly impacted them in negative ways, which they often tried to define in more innocent terms, such as calling it prejudice, stereotyping, or misunderstanding, which may not necessarily be racist. Most examples of these occurrences were shared in chapter four. To illustrate further, Arial (Black) said the following as she laughed: “Living in Vancouver, we are fine. Yeah. [laughs] Yeah.” Or she would say “Um… but luckily in Vancouver, it’s not too bad, not too bad. Like I said, it’s not necessarily racism, it’s just prejudices”. Yet, in the same interview, she shared quite a few instances when she faced unfair treatment as a Black woman.

It seemed like subtle forms of racism were impossible to acknowledge or discuss, let alone to admit they existed. Consequently, racism remained hidden within the realm of feelings of an individual. It appeared that racist acts towards youth were reduced to a matter of ethnoracial minorities’ perceptions or assumptions, as if it was not actually happening. Ervin (Chinese) talked about how it was difficult to make sense whether certain experiences could count as racism.

I think it’s really tough to deal with these feelings as it’s not something that is always easy to talk about. But… I think as soon as you … experience something like this, I guess it’s
really tough too, because you don’t always know if it’s actually racism and it’s always hard to assume that it is. Even though you are pretty sure about it, how do you call it out and say, ‘hey, I think you are being racist to me because of the colour of my skin’… You know, it leaves a really awkward situation.

Daisy (South Asian) talked about subtle, non-direct forms of discrimination, and gave examples of when it was difficult to categorize the situation as racist. When nuanced forms of racism were defined, only as the perceived reality of ethnoracial minorities, that reality was impossible to be shared with those who are white. According to Daisy, one cannot “assume” that people are racist unless they “directly” say discriminatory words. The risk associated with confronting these types of unclear situations is that the person who is acting racist “would deny it”, as there may be other explanations behind their behaviour. To avoid this conflict, Daisy’s inclination was to give people the benefit of the doubt, because, in her view, there is always a possibility that the racialized person is being judged not because of their skin colour, but because the situation actually warranted the negative interpretation of the event. For example, she said, if a white woman “was attacked by a man” in the past, it led her to behave more carefully towards men in general and her behaviour may not be driven by her racist beliefs towards Black men in a specific situation.

For Wilson (Chinese), calling out racism in overt situations may lead to “being biased” at times as it is shaped by the perspective “showing that white people are bad”. Similarly, Kevin (Chinese) expanded on the idea of what counts as racism as he shared his thoughts on ‘reverse racism’. He noted that frequently white people are being accused of racism unfairly because “they did something wrong back then”. Kevin suggested care is needed when judging the actions of white people as racist because that would mean showing prejudice towards them based on the
colour of their skin: “I don’t think every white person is racist, because then that is not fair. You can’t just judge by their skin colour.” Kevin alluded to the idea that racism is something that happened in the past and may be used inappropriately to interpret present events between racialized groups.

Arial discussed how Black people often choose to interpret encounters as racist when they are not. She cautioned that perceived racism warrants scrutiny when it is driven by what she considered the unrealistic expectations of Black people. Arial reinforced the dominant belief that racism has been resolved already and that it is time to move on to a ‘post-racial’ era. These core beliefs about racism being resolved, despite her providing evidence of the opposite, may be a sign of denial or avoidance being her coping mechanism, that may have given her permission to avoid having to confront racism. Arial suggested that “enough time has passed”, “we have legislation”, and there has been sufficient societal change regarding racism that she can state with certainty that Black people have to let it go.

We are Black people, we try to look for the faults and we try to look for racism. We try to make other people, not necessarily make other people look bad, but we want to stand for equality so much. And because of what has happened to us in the past, we so much desire for that equality all the time. The whole slavery thing was so long ago. People have forgiven, people have let go and it’s time for us to move on and move forward. So, the only way we can actually do that is by realizing that it’s time. Things have changed. We are not in a day and age where Black people cannot enter a certain store, white people cannot enter a certain store, there is equality now. … So, I think it’s really important that, you know, people realize that. - Arial
Stories like Arial’s revealed how youth were conditioned by the white dominant narrative logic, and perhaps absorbed by the idea that equality exists and only explicit racism is a ‘valid’ concern that warrants examination. With racism being a moral taboo and understood within those aforementioned limits, it becomes an unlikely reason for mistreatment. Therefore, before calling an incident racist, one should critically investigate it and eliminate any other possible explanations and reasons for the injustice. Youth worried about faulty accusations that, according to Arial, make one “look like an idiot”. On the same note, Sunny suggested that it was important not to make assumptions but try to understand first; to make sure that someone was actually discriminated against because of their race. His meaning making process was governed by the belief that “there is always… two sides of the story”. So first, before “jumping into” thinking that someone is mistreated because of their race, he would try to “understand what’s really going on” and to analyze what “the problem” or “the argument” is.

The youths’ vigilance about making faulty accusations highlighted their internalized fear that as a racialized person, they may be exaggerating the incident or making it up, appear as over reactive, or too sensitive. Perhaps awareness of these possible consequences led them to apply caution before naming racism, even if that is what it feels like to them, which in turn often prevented them from directly addressing it. It seemed that their default assumption was to approach an incident involving racialized people as being “not about race”.

Youth knew that calling out racism might be perceived as white people shaming, a common phenomenon widely perpetuated by white dominance. Examples of being vigilant seemed to serve as youth adjustments to those dominant systems helping them maintain some control, a sense of safety and peace of mind. Sandy pointed out the reasons why caution may be helpful before assuming that a white person will understand their concern: “it’s always … people
from the minority group will realize the obvious thing that the white people do. These things are always obvious to a minority group, but not to the majority group.” Her statement outlined the everyday realities of racialized persons having no option but to be hyper-vigilant regarding certain actions or thoughts of the oppressor. Even if racism was “obvious” to them, they still felt they had to enter the mind of a white person to understand how the situation may look through their eyes and perhaps to determine if there is a possibility of them denying the racism.

Sunny (Black) said that addressing racism on an interpersonal level can often be difficult and ineffective. First, because, according to him, it is a social issue, but also because it triggers feelings that are often hard to express assertively and in an effective way.

It’s just a social issue, it’s not an individual issue, right? So if you gonna try and draw attention to it or do that, you better do it in a right way to get more people’s attention to it in a right way, right. And it’s a big subject, it’s a touchy subject, so if you’re gonna try to talk about it or try to do something about it, you have to be careful how you approach it, how you…. you know, so… - Sunny

It seemed that the working mechanism created by hegemonic systems of whiteness shaped youth understandings of, and provided limits to, what counts as racism and, in turn, made confrontations in the face of racism particularly challenging, if not impossible. Youth often worried about making false accusations, which prevented them from being direct in the face of racism and geared their response towards containing their reactions.

5.1.2 Fear of reinforcing the stereotype

The second reason that prevented youth from confronting racist acts related to their fear of reinforcing existing stereotypes. Similarly to what was reported in the previous section, youth emphasized the importance of looking at the situation through the eyes of the other and
maintaining awareness about the stereotypes that white dominance systems created of them so they could intentionally avoid fitting into them or prove them wrong.

When discussing the ‘elevator scene’, youth agreed that the Black man’s actions were inappropriate for dealing with a racist situation because showing anger would exaggerate already existing stereotypes about Black males. They were all aware that once a stereotype is ingrained, it takes very little to perpetuate it. Rebecca called the elevator scene “immature” and unconsidered, as the Black person did not care how his behaviour may be harming Black communities by perpetuating this stereotype. Her reaction demonstrates youth awareness of the power of the collective response and the importance of solidarity with one’s own group, even if sometimes it is forced upon them by defining their group by the actions of one person. Rebecca, like the majority of other Black youth, knew that it is all too easy for people to reinforce stereotypes and that any confrontation, warranted or not, could be used as evidence against the racialized person. Rebecca said,

And it just makes us look really bad. That’s what I think. Because at some point everybody judges, we are all victims of stereotype and so he is just making the rest of us, like all Black males look like, ‘oh this is about what we’re thinking, so every time you go into an elevator, you need to be scared’. He is just reinforcing the fear that’s already there with some people, and he didn’t help us at all. - Rebecca

Sunny agreed with Rebecca saying that if people see Black males as being violent or even angry, even if it is a response to racism, “that gives the wrong impression of Black males”, people will have “more negative thoughts about [them]”, and be “more scared of a Black male”. To avoid these repercussions, he stressed how important it is to be aware of the mechanism of stereotyping while people “get [their] message across” in response to racism. In Sunny’s words,
People watch, right? People see, people watch our actions and all that, right? So, it’s just basically what you do, people would judge you according to what they see... So … you might want to make that awareness. - Sunny

Celia concurred, saying that “if a white racist turned on to watch that video, he would be [thinking] ‘you are an idiot, it is exactly why I don’t like Black people’, right?”

It seems that youth felt Black people often paid the price if one of them expressed anger. Therefore, as a self-defence mechanism and to avoid the consequences, Black youth favoured the idea of containing their emotions, especially by withholding expressions of anger, even if that meant accepting or adjusting to the rules of white superiority. They believed that by containing their emotions and intentionally proving stereotypes wrong, they could protect themselves from being negatively subjected to reinforced and harsher stereotypes.

Sandy gave an example of how the Chinese community perpetuates stereotypes and was judgmental towards them. She described how Chinese people “create a small little Chinese place for themselves so that they don’t have to adopt any culture here, or they don’t have to learn any English”. In her opinion, they contribute to the stereotypes about Chinese communities living in their ethnic enclaves without trying to fit into the wider culture. As Sandy said,

People … just want the good things here, so they come here because of the weather, the living environment, but they don’t like the other stuff, like they don’t want to do things to fit in, so they create this smaller thing, smaller place for themselves.

This example also indicates that Sandy buys into the stereotype that people living in ethnic enclaves refuse to integrate.

Being aware of how they are perceived, youth seemed to be living those stereotypes by constantly working hard to prove them wrong. It seemed that this awareness made them think
carefully before directly confronting racism, because they knew that if they call it out in a “stereotypical way”, they will face long lasting consequences. They unanimously agreed that they do not have much choice but follow these rules. If they behave otherwise, they will perpetuate the vicious cycle of stereotyping by causing more racism.

5.1.3 Hate begets hate: fear of the feedback loop

In addition to second-guessing acts of racism and raising awareness about the existing stereotypes to prove them wrong, the third commonly reported reason why youth avoided confrontation was their fear of creating a negative feedback loop of escalation.

Catherine was concerned that calling out racist acts may cause “more hate” and “more racial discrimination”. By “remaining neutral to the situation”, she hoped to de-escalate a possible conflict while also sending a message that she was not so easily affected, even if she was actually hurt. Catherine strategically calculated that her stoic response would make those people leave her alone in the future. Her response is also rooted in the belief that one must treat others how they want to be treated and may demonstrate that challenging or resisting racist behaviour meant an attack on a white person.

Wilson suggested that rather than confronting the person directly, it is better to tell other people about the painful situation for venting purposes and “just release stress”. While describing his dilemma, he was also aware that one must be careful with this strategy, as he also did not want the person to be drawn into the hate feedback loop: “that would cause more racial problems”. This example captures how difficult it was for youth to face these barriers daily, as it seemed apparent that there are never easy choices for them. They could never just think about what they wanted to do, or what was right; rather, they always had to exercise caution with the
unintended consequences of their choices, lest they become the ones that created problems instead of being victims of racism.

Chinese youth talked about how they were wary of confrontation, as it could lead to physical harm. They were focused on maintaining safety by avoiding provocation. In these conversations, youth talked about how they were careful not to make a big deal out of racism because they felt that things might escalate quickly to violence. Catherine said, “In some ways, there’s a type of self-defence. You don’t wanna make things big, which can potentially put you at risk for going into hospital or even dying.”

The simple act of walking down the street or in the hallways at school always had the potential of becoming sites of racism and confrontation, since, in the experience of youth, white people seemed to avoid moving aside on a sidewalk. According to Wilson, “usually it’s the white person that doesn’t move” and “usually Asians, they just walk around”: “White people… they don’t move. They expect you to move around, … usually you see Asians, they walk to the side to let them pass.” Wilson also added that these incidents of intimidation usually happen with strangers, because with people you know, you just stop and talk, without “run[ning] into each other”. So, in these microaggressions that come from people they do not know, there is no opportunity to “stop and talk to them”. Wilson explained that because they may “get angry and hit you”, “you don’t wanna cause any trouble”. Of interest here is that even though covert racist acts came from people that youth did not know, everyone adjusted their behaviour based on their embodied ‘knowing’ of the other. It appeared that the encounter was in fact between people who ‘knew’ about each other, either from stereotypes or deeply held beliefs about the body they encountered in front of them. Based on their, often unconscious, knowledge of a racialized body, white people would not move and expect others to walk around them. However, based on their
knowledge of a white body, racialized youth would automatically give a wide berth, rather than risk the consequences of an accidental bump. This thinking was evident in the dialogue:

Kevin: Well, I can’t do anything about it because if I do something about it, then they will...

Catherine: hit you?

Kevin: Yeah, so, I won’t. I want to, but I don’t...

This exchange displays how youth had to have constant vigilance of their surroundings to protect their physical safety. These spaces became sites of intimidation because white students were in bigger groups - physically bigger, or appeared bigger - so they would not move out of the way, thereby forcing the Chinese students to go around them. At other times, when youth tried to refuse walking around and went straight, they would just “bump into each other”, according to Wilson. He also said that if one tries to “argue with them, they might say ‘Oh, do you want to fight or something’? But you don’t want to fight with them, right, because usually are a lot stronger”.

There was a sense of vulnerability and sometimes hopelessness in youth descriptions of the dominant groups. Kevin described it like this: “they feel that they are bigger than you while you are down here, they are right up here, so they have the power to do whatever they want”. He further reflected on his feelings, saying that he felt “disrespected”, but admitted: “I can’t do anything about it, but I just feel [a] push down.”

Sites of physical and mental intimidation revealed the role of non-verbal cues and communication. Youth had to be constantly attuned to the person walking in front of them by sensing their intentions in order to anticipate further actions. Walking straight into another person, as if that person does not exist, is a physical manifestation of power with an expectation
to be acknowledged. This passive-aggressive behaviour has two elements: the first is the physical intimidation of not moving, and the second is a psychic dimension of rendering someone invisible. As Wilson described,

I would be walking towards the wall of people and they will be talking while ignoring me.

I would be saying ‘excuse me’ and they wouldn’t respond. They would not respond at all and I would have to go right through them, like push them away literally.

In the following two sections, I discuss the tactics youth engage with in order to contain the situation.

5.2 Tactics to avoid conflict: external coping strategies

In the previous section, I discussed reasons why youth did not directly address racist encounters. Youth noted that to avoid conflict and negative consequences, they implemented some tactics to navigate racialized spaces. I divided their reported strategies in two categories: external encounters and internal resources. Here I report on externally focused schemes, through which youth adjusted their behaviours to gain some control of the racist situation. These strategies included youth calling out only overt forms of racism, taking responsibility to make white people feel comfortable, efforts in reclaiming their identity, and attempts to maintain safety by avoiding provocation.

5.2.1 Tactics of second-guessing racism: only calling out overt racism

Previously reported findings made it evident how, by making racist encounters (in)visible, the hegemonic idea of whiteness remained untouched and sustained, building a wall that is impossible to move. When hitting that wall, often typified by the denial of racism, youth found themselves stuck without having a choice other than to learn strategies of adjustment. For instance, youth avoided repercussions of mistakenly identifying an encounter as racist by doing
so only after being able to assess the situation clearly as such, e.g., being called derogatory names.

Frank shared how he intervened in a situation at his work when a white person repeatedly used the ‘n word’ towards another Black person. He stepped up to explain that it is not okay to use the ‘n word’, even if one hears and learns of it from rap songs performed by Black people. Frank explained to his fellow Black person the importance of recognizing verbal racism and standing up for oneself: “this is the way you have to stand up, this is a common decency; if you hear that word, man, it’s basically verbal assault and a hate crime”. He continued by saying that these verbal racist encounters can easily turn into physical violence as a response: “If you turn around and punch him… Obviously, violence is not an answer, but … he should not do that. Not that ‘oh, I am just going to step back for this one’. No.”

Another instance of directly exposing racism was shared by Kate (Black) as she recalled how she was unwilling to let a racist microaggression go unchallenged. While speaking to a customer, she identified the tone of his response to her as subtly racist. She confronted him, saying: “Are you using that tone because I am Black?”, to which he responded “Oh, that’s the way I talk”. Despite his failure to admit what he was doing, she continued: “Oh, okay, if you talk that way, then it’s fine, but if you are just approaching me like that because I’m Black, then you know, I don’t like that”. He responded: “You think I am being racist?” And she replied: “No. If that’s the way you are, then you’re not being racist. Are you?”

Their interaction shows how Kate directly addressed this nuanced racism and, despite the person being defensive about his intentions, she remained assertive and engaged. Kate did not doubt herself, as she knew she was a target of racism and that the person used certain words and tone because she was Black, saying that if she were “someone else, he would be [saying] ‘hi!’.”
After Kate told this story, there was a self-reflective moment that followed when she thought about their interaction, and with pride in her voice, she then said: “Huh, that was cool!” This suggested that she was very aware that it was an uncommon response to directly confront the subtle forms of racism, one that typically would be left unaddressed; and that, ultimately, she felt empowered by doing so.

Rebecca (Black) shared an example of how she learned to stand up for herself from her mom. She shared the story about when her mom intervened in a racist situation in elementary school, and a boy from her school called her racist names while playing at her housing complex. Rebecca’s mom “did the fighting” for her, asking the school principal to act on this incident.

She [mother] went to the school … and she went to go talk to my principal. And I don’t know exactly what she said to him, but she went to go yell at him. She told me three, four years later: ‘I told him, I want something done now, I need to call his parents and tell him what he has done. I need him to be punished for what he has done because he shouldn’t be going around, she went ballistic, so... Because she didn’t think it’s fair, because nobody has ever said that to me before, so. She didn’t feel fair that I had to go through that.

(Rebecca)

Reflecting on the incident, Rebecca said that her mom fighting for her was a moment in her life when she felt empowered as a Black woman. She said, “I have the right to stand up for myself when something like that happened”.

On that note, Rebecca said that for her it was easier to call out direct forms of racism. If she was a target of name-calling, for example, she would address that situation immediately, but her reaction would be different in situations of covert racism. On the one hand, she was willing to give her friends the benefit of the doubt that their comments were not ill-spirited, and gave
them her feedback, clearly expressing her boundaries: “don’t ever say that to me”. However, she says, “if somebody is more passive …, then I can’t really be like, ‘oh, you know, you are being racist then’. I can’t do that because it’s not necessarily… [racist]. It could be totally something else”.

Eva (Black) said that one gets violent when they “have to defend [themselves]” and noted that when she is a target of racism, she asks the person to stop, and “if they don’t”, she said, “I’ll handle it my way. Like…. I just know my way”. Eva shared a story of how she experienced racist remarks from a peer at school for not smiling. As a response, she slapped the person. I described this incident in my previous chapter when I discussed how the school principal handled this conflict by not supporting Eva and failing to address the issue of racism as a source of the argument. In response, the principal asked Eva to apologize for using violence, which is an example of how resistance is being unquestionably framed as violence, regardless of any racist provocation that had previously occurred. Eva reported,

I was so mad, I came out like ‘what’s your problem’? Then she started swearing, so I slapped her. And then she said, ‘go ahead, bitch, slap me again’. I slapped her again. She went running crying to the principal. - Eva

Even in this case of overt racism, the lack of support and acknowledgment of racism from school authorities gave Eva an indication that it is not safe to fight racism. Later in the conversation, she said that the best way to deal with violence is to ignore it, since “the more you open your mouth, it will go bigger and bigger.” Interestingly, although not surprisingly, Eva, who was a target of racism, did not mention the possibility of approaching the principal for support in the event of racist provocations. This exemplifies how having a lack of evidence to prove whether an incident was racist may lead racialized youth to silence even in situations they perceived as truly racist.
Being ignored or rendered as invisible was a repetitive theme in the accounts of Chinese youth, as was discussed in the first chapter of the findings. The theme of being invisible continued in the ways Chinese youth described their responses to racist acts. They shared how white people would act as if the Chinese person was not even there. Nelson described the incident at the hospital when taking care of his mother, in which he tried to speak up to health authorities about being ignored and then received the silent treatment again as no one would respond to him. It seemed that the white person’s silence came from their awareness that they hold the power. Additionally, in this situation, it was especially difficult for Nelson to remain assertive as he too was dealing with an institutional power. His story demonstrated how youth faced situations calling for action and that ‘letting it go’ was not the answer. However, while well aware that there was a strong likelihood that his concerns would be dismissed, his residual feeling of helplessness was only exacerbated by the situation. In such instances, youth felt powerless and had to find ways to navigate their invisibility in situations when their silence would have tremendous consequences. Nelson described his efforts to be assertive: “I complained, I wrote the letter, but no one answered me there.” <…> “I say, ‘hey, guys, what are you doing?’ I tried to say it, but you just don’t… you keep ignoring me. And then he kicks me out of the room there.”

This revealed how Nelson was in a ‘no-win’ situation. Whatever his choice of approaching the situation, he had to compromise his safety either way. He was determined to challenge the incident, as his mother’s life was at stake, and therefore he did speak up that, in his opinion, the medical team had made a mistake. He realized that even if his mother did not survive surgery because of an error made by the doctor, he would be the one blamed for it, as in their view, he
was the one not able to share the correct information with the doctor about his mother’s condition (although he did, yet was ignored). Nelson described how he felt blamed:

> It’s very hard, you know, if my mom got a medication and she died, what will happen there? He would blame on me”. <…>“It’s very hard, though. Because where the people their name is, they can try to find something to blame on. Language may be the one.

Nelson also talked about being ignored in a situation at his work, where the fact that his white colleagues were paid more was addressed. When he tried to inquire about it, no one responded and just ignored him, as Nelson described:

> What’s the answer? They just ignore you. Because when they say anything, then it will become an issue. So they tend not to listen, then that means no more issues… I keep sending letters and something, but the thing is if I do [it] too aggressively, it would be an issue.

Nelson recalled how his Japanese co-worker, who spoke up in an assertive way about equal pay, got fired. This experience demonstrates how speaking up for oneself may not always be a viable option, as it either gets ignored or leads to termination. Even if ethnoracial minority individuals would find the strength and confidence to ask for fairness, they had to be aware of the consequences of being perceived as ‘too aggressive’ about it. This demonstrates how for making themselves visible, youth run into the risk of being punished. Consequently, youth learned to avoid addressing the encounters by simply walking away.

Sandy also shared a story about the power dynamics at work, where she was a target of racism. She had to ignore racist remarks and follow work etiquette instead. As per Sandy, “I just served her because at that moment, she is our customer and customer is always right… So, I cannot argue with her”.


All participants communicated uncertainty about their actions during racist encounters. They all agreed on the complexities around the choices available to them. Ervin (Chinese) raised doubts that despite seeing the value and power of standing up for oneself in a racist situation, he may not have the required courage and confidence to do so. His words highlighted a prevailing theme that youth seemed to be scrambling to determine what was the most efficient reaction in racist encounters, especially in the circumstances when racism is subtle. Ervin reported,

It’s hard to say if that happens to me how I would respond. Probably I know better how to respond now, based on what my character did [note: in the skit that he performed]. But it’s hard to say in a real situation, if I had guts to do that. Would I? It’s still sort of kind of, I would still be a bit scared and intimidated by that girl in the restaurant [note: white girl showing prejudice]. It definitely gives me a way of looking at it, and now I know ‘ok, I have this power to do that’, but it would take time for me to say, ‘this is how I would react’.

Youth agreed that confrontation in a racist event is often directly related to safety. They must make decisions about whether calling out racism in a particular situation is worth the risk to their mental or physical well-being. The persistent theme around the topic of whether to confront a racist act is the demand to respond on the spot and the lack of time to think. Often, these decisions needed to be made quickly, without having the luxury of time to think about what the appropriate reaction should be.

Susan (South Asian) brought up the idea of ‘taking time’, as she found that for her, a safer way to confront her peers was more effective through the phone. She said that it was better to make a phone call if she needed to have confrontations, which indicated that she wanted to gain
some sort of control of the situation and maintain relative safety by creating some space. In her words:

   Just to talk to the person, just to hear their voice and talk to them. And sometimes you don’t need to be in front of the person because that might just make the situation worse. So, it might actually prevent things from escalating. Just like, you know, if you get into a fight, you can hang up, you can calm your nerves down, call back, that kind of thing and you know, I don’t know, sometimes I think it’s better to talk on the phone than to talk in person or through e-mails.

She continued speaking of her struggle with constantly needing to make the “right” choice of how to react. As Susan further said,

   In terms of feeling, I do [feel]. I’m sure, because we all dealt with it, you feel hurt, you know, you feel uncomfortable and stuff like that, but it’s really hard to figure out how to react to that in the right manner because maybe right on the spot, you may not even react the right way that you should, you might just snap right back and start yelling and they will be like ‘ah, typical or whatever blah, blah, blah’…

Youth knew that, all too often, the wrong decision would lead to harm. Susan said that she is ‘the type of person’ that if someone said something hurtful to her, she would not be afraid to challenge them and point out their racist remarks. Yet, she said, “if that was kind of something like a small remark or something, I just roll my eyes”. This showed how Susan was constantly running a kind of internal algorithm to decide if a racist comment is significant enough to call it out. Since she encountered those kinds of remarks so often, and she “dealt with [them] before”, she often thought that it was futile to address it every single time, so, sometimes, she would just “brush it off” instead.
It seems that to avoid mistakenly appraising a situation as racist, youth constantly required using discernment when they navigated racist spaces.

### 5.2.2 Identity struggles when resisting stereotypes

With awareness of existing stereotypes about them, and to avoid perpetuating these images further, youth developed ways to behave differently than expected to prove that the labels they are given are inaccurate. Therefore, they tried to behave in a manner contrary to the preconceived expectation.

For example, Black youth, who are constantly portrayed as violent, actively condemned and never justified violence as a reaction to racism. Sunny (Black) emphasized that it is important to confront people when they are being racist, even when, and especially if, they are “being subtle” about it, since, otherwise, they would not “think [their behaviour] affects you” or that “it is a big deal”. He added that it is important, before confronting racism, to “think about it” carefully so that one does it in a “right way” and adds how he “completely disagrees” with an aggressive response to racism. Sunny:

> So, like I said, a lot of my friends aren’t like that, and we approach [racism] completely differently, not violently, definitely not. I guess I don’t fit in that group, I don’t fit in that Black stereotype group because I don’t have any friends that are like that. If I did, I won’t be hanging out with people like that right now anyway. - Sunny

This is a good example of how Black youth, who are often portrayed as violent, refuse using violence against racism. Similarly, Frank talked about how, instead of being confrontational, he found that it was more effective to use humour and sarcasm to diffuse the tension in subtle racist encounters. For example, in a scenario when he sensed racist tension among a newly met group of peers who were white, he took control of the situation by playing up certain stereotypical
characteristics of Black people for humorous purposes. Frank creatively navigated the scene as if he knew exactly what he had to do:

To me it’s always fun. I try to make that Black American accent, especially from the south. Then I am going to that old, slave kind of jargon. …. it kind of clears the air. Or they will say something that can be misconstrued as completely racist, but they are just making a joke.

Frank was able to contain his emotions through his ability to lean into the moment of tension and express his feelings in a way that is non-confrontational. Frank later on gave another example how he used humour to show resistance to nuanced forms of racism during an incident with police, when he referred to his Afro-hair as a helmet:

I was skating on a side street; they pulled me over again and gave me a speech for not wearing a helmet. To what I replied at that time, as my hair was kind of an afro, I replied that ‘I have a helmet up there’. And they got super frustrated, I just left.

In both instances, Frank playfully used his Black identity characteristic to make a point as his way to navigate stereotypes against him.

Chinese youth also reported how through stereotyping, they experienced othering and the lack of belonging. As a response to the feeling of exclusion, youth developed various strategies to fit in. Some youth admitted that while their efforts to fit into the larger culture often were purely a safety measure, they often felt the double pressure of being teased from within their own ethnoracial group as if it is a betrayal of their culture by blending into the mainstream. Wilson described the divide within the Chinese community as one based on language proficiency and its choice. He identified tension between “Chinese people that can’t speak Chinese and a Chinese
person that can’t speak English well”, which alludes to an issue that when youth are trying not to fit into the stereotype, they may run into the risk of an identity crisis. In his words:

…Chinese people… there’re some that are really fluent in Chinese and some that aren’t, right. Some that have been here longer, they speak English more, so sometimes people who speak Chinese, they say, oh,… they say ‘you’re a banana, like yellow outside but more western inside’. Yeah, they have those terms for.. <…> Like they call them a banana, Chinese outside are yellow and then white inside. – Wilson

Even if youth reported that a strong bond with their ethnic group gave them strength (which will be discussed later in this chapter), they also noted that being too enmeshed with their ethnoracial identity may be a source of potential discrimination. For example, this was evident when they talked about living in Richmond, spending time with their own ethnoracial group instead of making friends from other cultural groups or speaking Chinese instead of English. Therefore, it seemed that not all youth agreed that strong ethnoracial identity is a protective factor from discrimination. Instead, they felt an expectation from society to constantly work towards demonstrating how different they are from the rest of their ethnoracial group, or from a ‘stereotypical’ member of the group. In other words, they attempted to prove the stereotype wrong.

In the same vein, Celia thought that the reason she did not experience that much racism while growing up was because she did not behave “like a typical Black girl acts..”. When asked to elaborate on the characteristics of a Black girl that she had in mind, Celia reported:

… very strong personality, they are very... like opinionated and you know, just stuff like that, but I never, I never really grew up around Black people... So I guess I just, I think like a white person, apparently [laughs]... My brother used to bug me when I was younger. He
used to call me ‘whitey’, ‘cos he’s like… you don’t even act like a Black person, you act like white [laughs].

It seemed that youth constantly faced limits of belonging while they attempted to negotiate their cultural identities. On one hand, they expressed being proud members of their racialized group, but on the other, they would take responsibility and feel ashamed about some stereotypes being true, thereby clearly separating themselves from that stereotype. As Sunny mentioned earlier, “I don’t fit that Black stereotype group”.

Sunny also talked about how his faith gave him purpose and direction and represented a good moral compass. He stressed that his identity as a Christian ‘saved’ him by providing tools to deal with racism and opportunities to reject the stereotypes about Black men. Without those tools, his behaviour would be different. As he said, “it would be stereotypical, it would be completely negative,” and he would “deal with race in a wrong way.” Sunny noted that he would not respond the way a Black person is ‘expected’ to respond to racism if he was not Christian.

In summation, it appeared that youth constantly tried to maintain vigilance and were cautiously calculating what happens next as a way to prevent racist encounters and contain the situation, where possible. It seems that youth actively used their knowledge of stereotypes and the expected treatment that would follow as the foundation to work on preventing negative experiences. This became complicated as students had to navigate the formation of their own identities while negotiating the racist spaces.

5.2.3 **Attempts to educate others by correcting stereotypes**

Another strategy youth used to battle existing stereotypes against them or address other forms of racism was teaching another person about who they are and how they deserve to be
treated. Youth said that normally they would devote time and energy to engage only with their friends, or people close to them, to address racism. As Sunny noted, “I take the time to correct them [friends] and say, you know, what you said is not true or it’s not right. Because I know that they are close to me, so I will take my time and invest my time to correct them”. Arial also added that she takes on a teaching role within her friend circle to “help them learn more about my culture, my other world”.

Nelson (Chinese) found himself educating others about his country of origin when he experienced prejudice in the form of the common trope about being Chinese and working in a laundromat, which was an insult to him. He responded to this stereotype by pointing out that Hong Kong is also a “big developed” city:

Not just you guys have a more developed country. Hong Kong also, we are just as New York. No difference. We are a big city. We did not come from a small village. We got certain education standard, we got very good life there. We moved to Canada so that we can have an even better life here. That’s what we want. <…> [Just because] I am not white doesn’t mean anything.

Arial (Black) noted that she would share her knowledge with people about Africa, but when people do not care to learn about her and her culture, she would get frustrated and walk away. But if people “decide to learn” she says, “I try my best to educate them. I ask them to read all articles out there.”

Youth hoped that people would really want to get to know them, and want to learn about their culture, instead of making false assumptions and forming biases and prejudices. In Arial’s words:
I’m trying to say, Black is not a country, it involves many different kinds of people, just as white is not a country, it involves many different kinds of nations that come together. So I just wish that people would, instead of assuming, they would ask, ‘tell me more about your country, tell me more about where you come from’. Some people do and it’s great and I’d love to share with them because they want to know. But some people don’t know, they don’t care to learn…

Sunny said that when he experiences prejudice from strangers, he wants to tell them: “hey, you know what, that’s not how I am, maybe you should get to know me first.” In the same vein, Catherine (Chinese) agreed that educating people can make a difference, noting that awareness and knowledge matter, such as in the idea that “the more aware you are, the more likely you are to start thinking about change”. Arial echoed the idea, that it is important to “spread your message, as much as possible”, which will make some people hopefully understand it. Yvonne (South Asian) and Daisy both emphasized that anti-racist education can be an efficient tool to combat racism.

Education on a systemic level was mentioned as one of the efficient ways to make a change in combating racism. Youth talked about their own efforts to address racism by engaging in a discussion, educating a person, and the responsibilities of raising awareness through educational institutions and the media. Youth agreed that formal education must take a proactive role in including issues of racism in their curriculum as it is the only way to achieve structural change.

Yvonne (South Asian) said, “I think racism education about violence is good for everybody. Some people may say ‘oh, it’s not relevant to me; … but you do need constant reminders”. She said that even though someone might not be involved in racist acts, education
would serve as a positive reinforcement like a “pat on the back”. Daisy agreed: “That’s the one thing that kids need to be. They need to be educated on racism. And I think this is a very good thing to do”. She said that it should be made clear how we arrived at this time now:

This is what happened. This is what Europeans came and did. This is why it is like this now. Someone has to tell them, this is not right. You cannot say things like this. This hurts people. You cannot say this. I think that’s what needs to be done. - Daisy

As a further strategy to confront racism, it seemed that youth were willing to engage with others to assert their identity. They hoped this would be helpful in combatting pre-existing images of them as an ethnoracial minority. They usually reserved this effort for close friends as they were always making decisions regarding how much emotional labour they were willing to invest in educating people.

5.2.4 Responsibility to make white people comfortable

Another way that youth negotiated their interpersonal relationships in racist spaces was by being friendly to a white person. Taking responsibility to neutralize the racial conflict in this way was reported by youth, and in particular, Black youth. This persistent theme of youth trying to engage in a non-confrontational way in racist situations encapsulates their efforts to make the other person feel comfortable. Despite acknowledging the constant violation of personal boundaries, youth still felt responsible for accommodating the feelings of the white person by intentionally being nice, forgiving, and friendly. Participants shared the belief that being strategic and proactive with white people can reduce the likelihood of racism to occur in the future.

Arial talked about her parents’ repeated efforts to make friends with a neighbour described as “a very strong German man”, who was neither welcoming nor friendly. Her father’s attempts included sharing with the neighbour that he was a pastor and meant no harm, but to no avail.
Recalling that those efforts led to nothing positive induced a deeply emotional response from Arial as she repeated: “Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing!”

It was only after the neighbour’s wife got sick that he accepted Arial’s family’s friendship. “He realized that the only thing my dad wanted to do was help. So, my dad would go over there and pray for him, you know, helped him through it.”

Arial’s interpretation of what happened showed how she normalized the efforts of her family, needing to endeavor to comfort a white person, perhaps with an intent to reject the stereotype of a threatening Black person. It seems that her meaning making process was designed around being forgiving and excusing discriminatory behaviour. Arial described when the neighbour finally came around, “friendly and relaxed”,

he realized, ‘okay, these Black people, they are actually friendly, they are not here to do any harm, they don’t want to kill me, they don’t want to do a drive by, they don’t want to shoot me down from the window, nothing. They just wanted to help’.

Arial said that when she was little, she did not understand why her father would try so hard to be nice. While she went about her own business, her parents were adamant about “breaking the barrier” with their neighbour, “…’give them a pie, give them this and that...’”. That pandering bothered Arial, but “…what can you do?”.

As she got older, and became aware of social cues about being Black, she was able to make sense of her family experience; of why her father was so persistent in trying to become friends with white neighbours despite the racist undertones; of what it took for her family to get where they were, to earn respect and friendly treatment.

She described that moment of realization, when she saw how Black people were portrayed in the media and perceived by other people: “Okay, so this is what people actually think of us,
now we might do our best to break down those barriers, and to start afresh, right”. She became aware of why her family or other Black families made the extraordinary efforts they did, which was: “to make sure people understand we are nice”. She came to appreciate what her father was doing: modeling this behaviour for the rest of his family since he, as a Black person, knew that there were some unwritten rules that were necessary to follow in order to be seen as a non-threatening human being.

Other youth also discussed how the onus is on the racialized person to refute the narrative that the dominant culture creates of them. Catherine, while describing a scene of entering the washroom and seeing a white female, said that she ventured to diffuse the possible tension and “dissolved the barrier” between them. She said, “the one thing I did was I smiled back at her, and she saw my reflection in the mirror and she smiled back”. Catherine’s example demonstrates how she needed to be attuned to the situation and made a choice to be proactive to prevent possible mistreatment or prejudice against her.

The impact of non-verbal communication and power of one’s body language was also mentioned by Yvonne, who also believed that it is the responsibility of a person of colour as well to try to make a situation “comfortable” and avoid having “an attitude”. It may show how even at a young age, youth understood the importance of, and took responsibility for, managing white people’s feelings. Therefore, when they deemed themselves as being a possible trigger, they took it upon themselves to diffuse the tension. Interestingly, youth talked about racist encounters as if both parties occupied equal power positions. When discussing the elevator scene, even though Yvonne said that at least one of the people should have shown a friendly attitude, she was referring to the Black person’s lack of effort to make the situation comfortable.
Echoing Yvonne, Susan also talked about what a Black person should have done to make the situation lighter. “I definitely agree”, she says, that “one person has to be the bigger person, right, and kind of just be a nice…[person], even a gesture just to smile or anything like that”. Rebecca, too, stated that it would be a much better outcome if a Black person would “be calm” and “just calmly said, ‘I am a Black man, but that doesn’t mean that I’m going to steal your purse’”.

Youth thought that by displaying certain polite manners, racialized individuals can gain more control over the situation and prevent the occurrence of racism. Nelson discussed the importance for those affected by racism to start breaking the barriers themselves and giving different “friendlier signals”, such as “show the face, not to show your back”, “give some distance”, “show that you are not doing anything”, or “start some simple conversation to ease the barrier”.

Youth agreed on following the unspoken rules, which centred on the comfort of a white person and demanded that ethnoracial minority individuals act on behalf of their respective ethnoracial group to avoid perpetuating stereotypes further.

5.2.5 **Attempts to fit into the dominant cultural standard**

In the previous section, I discussed how youth engaged in making white people feel comfortable by being friendly to them. I continue to examine how youth used their knowledge of stereotypes to act in the opposite way to address the challenge of not perpetuating the stereotype against them. Here I focus on Chinese and South Asian youth, who talked about resisting stereotypes about them by adjusting to societal standards. Specifically, they reported experiencing a sense of exclusion from society at large because of their strong bond with their ethnic group, difficult to pronounce names or their language difficulties. Therefore, for them,
making a concerted effort to blend into English speaking society was a common strategy to negotiate stereotypes and possibly avoid racism.

As Wilson said: “I guess, even if you are from different culture, you just speak English and you are fine”. Sandy explained how she was encouraged by her mom to learn English to integrate into the dominant group circles:

My mom said, ‘you can only learn from your mistakes, so don’t get embarrassed and stop speaking English, because you know, there are a lot of Chinese people in the school, you can choose not to speak English; you can choose to just hang out with the people that only speak Chinese in school. But then, my mom said, ‘you can’t do that’. Yeah, you… ‘I know, you get embarrassed and all that, you have to try again and again. Yeah, because there are a lot of opportunities around you; there are a lot like white people, native speakers.’ - Sandy

Three participants - Daisy, Catherine and Kevin - talked about how their names were a focal point in their experiences of racism, which led them to develop proactive strategies to prevent being stereotyped. Youth acknowledged the hierarchy of names that determines the level of cultural acceptance, where the leading and valued categories are English names and names deemed pronounceable. Two participants expressed concerns that non-English names on resumes would evoke a negative reaction regarding who they are, prior to even meeting a potential employer. Daisy shared her story about her Punjabi name and how she experiences it in society based on a class system, with white people occupying “the high class”:

So when you see someone who is Black or Asian up there you think, you always wonder how do they… or are they always accepted? And if you think ‘oh, I wanna be a doctor or something like that; I wanna to make lots of money and what not. Will you be accepted,
will it be hard for you to get a job in that class? Because it is always racism, I think, regarding work as well. When someone who is doing resumes can’t pronounce your name, because you are from another culture, then are they going to turn you away? Do you have to change your name for future work? – Daisy

It was with this issue in mind that her mother chose an English name ‘Daisy’ for her first name and Punjabi ‘J-minder’ as her middle name. Her mother did not want Daisy to have a Punjabi name on her resume as she could run into the same issue as her mom when she was younger. Her mother didn’t want potential employers to jump to conclusions about Daisy’s ability to speak English. Daisy talked of hearing stories about resume’s being thrown out because of the non-English name, which seemed to her very unfair as she said that one “should be able to put your name on there and not be discriminated against, because of your culture or where you come from.”

Similarly, Catherine indicated how changing names was strategically done by Chinese-Canadians in order to compete in the job market, as employers are “less likely to hire” people with a non-English name. Chinese youth, who were born in Canada, were given an English name as their first name and a Chinese name as their middle name. Catherine says:

Yeah, Chinese name is our middle name. So they would ask, ‘Oh, do you have a middle name on it’? Yeah, I do. What is it? Oh, I don’t want to say it’. But I say it, I usually end up saying it, and then ‘Oh, okay’. There’s, it’s like end of discussion. They don't really know how to respond to it. So, after a while, you are kind of embarrassed and secretive about your real name.

These encounters put pressure on youth to change their name so they can meet the standard of ‘pronounceable’ to increase their competitiveness in the job market.
Kevin described being surprised at the convention of choosing an English name, and how he was just given one by his cousin when he first arrived to Canada in elementary school. He was told that is just how things are done in Canada regarding Chinese names, but he was clearly uncomfortable with it from the beginning. When a high school teacher suggested he go back to his Chinese name, the student did so as he felt supported and validated by the encouragement. His story illustrated how rules and values of the dominant culture, often not even noticeable to dominant groups, impacted lives of ethnoracial groups and determined their participation in society. Kevin said:

I am actually an immigrant. I immigrated here six years ago. So, ... in my past, I am supposed to be called J.L., but then when I came here, my cousin, for some reason, gave me another name. Because then he said this is how people in Canada do if they are not born in here. They, in their past, may have had a Chinese name, but then in school they would be called an English name with a Chinese last name. So they [my parents] changed it, but then when I went to high school, there is one teacher that tells me ‘if you have a Chinese name, then why don’t you use your Chinese name now, ‘cos then it is your name, why do you have to change your name’? So, in high school, I use my Chinese name now, I don’t use Kevin anymore, because... But then, in the art studio, they still call me Kevin, so... – Kevin.

Interestingly, Kevin indicated that the teacher had asked him why he was using an English name since he already has a Chinese name. On one hand, it seems like the teacher’s support was important to Kevin. On the other hand, one could perhaps think that the question was disingenuous, as it would be hard to believe that the teacher wouldn’t be aware of the pressure
that Chinese students face to change their names and recognize the privileges that an English name gives to Chinese-Canadians.

The stories in this section demonstrate how youth make the effort to resist stereotypes and adjust to the expectations of the dominant culture, for instance, changing their names, in order to prevent racist acts against them.

5.3 Internal coping strategies as responses to racism

When youth were not able to engage in racist encounters in a meaningful way, they turned inwards and relied on resources within themselves and their immediate environment to deal with the impact of racism. I start this section with a report on why youth often discovered that all their efforts to respond to racism through interpersonal encounters were futile. I then examine the function of the internal strategies that youth utilized to minimize their emotional pain.

5.3.1 The futility of the effort in responding

Before I delve into some of the participants’ spiritual coping strategies, in this section I examine the weight of the impossibility to solve their felt racism.

Kevin emphasized the idea that no one can really solve the problem because racism is something impossible to solve and it will always be around, as long as different cultures separate the world. According to him, there will inevitably be discrimination, - in his words, “if there is good, there will always be evil”. Reflecting on the idea of impossibility, Kevin suggested that the only possible solution to combat racism may be to “get rid of everything, every culture” and become one culture. He expressed his discouragement since, for him, the disappearance of racism is purely hypothetical. In his words, “you can’t really solve it”. Celia also thought that it was pointless to try to confront a racist person, as “it does not even matter what you say, the person can’t change”. Similarly, Catherine thought that people cannot accept being challenged
on racism as it would mean “changing your opinion and it’s really hard to change your opinion about something”.

Jessica emphasized the futility of getting help from an authority figure, because it is usually a lengthy process that requires time and energy without immediate results. By the time one receives help or has support in place, it may be too late, or the victim is expected to find a solution on their own. Jessica said, “even if you go look for help, the chances are that it’s not immediate... by the time you get help, there is probably... that feeling is already kind of lost... in a sense.” She talked about the initial feeling of hurt and needing help during a racist encounter, that may disappear as it takes too much energy to keep that feeling. Rather, it is easier to forget about the racist act and the person.

Describing how he witnessed his parents’ response to racial incidents when driving, Wilson noted that sometimes his parents “scroll down the window and yell back at them and then [they] drive away.” The reaction they would get back was surprise or anger. However, Wilson admitted, that most of the time these encounters did not lead anywhere, so they would just “pretend nothing happened” as he thought it is “better just [to] leave it”.

Sandy brought up the idea of running into hopelessness and helplessness in the face of racism, as it was so pervasive and ingrained in her everyday life: “What can I do, right? It’s ... and this happens everywhere. Even though I do something, it doesn’t mean anything. So, it’s useless or... yeah, people might think that it’s useless”. She continued that racism is an “obvious thing”, that it becomes normalized and, as a background noise, is not acknowledged and gets ignored. In her words, “racial violence is a social norm. It’s a reality we all accepted.” The pervasiveness of racism leads to it becoming a form of white noise. Consequently, youth
developed internal coping mechanisms that helped them to dissociate from this chronic stressor to ease their mental burden. I will discuss these strategies in the following part of this section.

5.3.2 **Coping with powerlessness through religion**

Youth used two emotional and spiritual methods that they found most helpful when their efforts to seek help were not possible: music and religion. In the following sections, I discuss the function of these two ways of coping. Practising faith as a way of coping was widely discussed among Black youth, who were part of a Black Christian church community. All young people from that group shared religion as their main source of strength and coping. Music was an overarching theme among all participants, which was also connected to mindfulness and leaning on the strength of their ancestors.

Specifically, common practices that helped youth make sense of events that they had no control over included praying and singing, reading the Bible, church attendance, scriptural readings, journal writing, dancing, listening to music or meditating. Through engaging in these activities, youth were also able to deal with feelings of alienation, regulate complex emotions, and gain a sense of purpose, belonging and empowerment.

Some turned to ritual prayer when they felt helpless, trapped, or powerless. By praying, they hoped to gain more clarity on how to behave in racist situations by making sense of the racist encounters when they felt lost and disoriented. For example, Sunny said that in racist situations that he “can’t deal with” on his own, he turned to prayer for guidance on how to move forward hoping that: “God really shows [him] a way to either deal with it or to oppose the person and make [the situation] better”.

Celia added that hopelessness in facing racism comes from being aware of the impossibility of changing the person. Therefore, instead of engaging in a conflict in those
situations when the task is bigger than she can take on, Celia talked about suppressing her feelings in the moment until she was able to release them through some kind of religious salvation by giving power to God. She would “brush it off” and “pray for that person, that God will open their eyes”.

Similarly, while Arial dealt with these feelings of helplessness and loss of control, religion provided her with a wider perspective and meaning, as it reminded her of the temporality of things since, based on Christian belief, everyone will go to heaven. These thoughts helped her to minimize the importance of racism as she approached it as a mundane everyday stressor, and she underscored the sense of fairness that will eventually prevail.

We have to obviously deal with the situation at hand, but at the same time we also have to realize…, [that] God is bigger than all of our problems, so you know what, we can deal with it. It gives us the strength.

Arial stressed that she dealt with racism in the here and now, but only to a certain extent. She repeated the phrase “we will go to heaven anyway” emphatically, which may have served as a protective mechanism to address the lack of control over the racism she faced. There was a feeling of resignation in her statement, but paradoxically, a resignation framed as a strength because she knew that, despite it all, she will ultimately be able to cope, even if it only meant engaging with the idea of an eternal salvation. Her example perhaps reinforces the idea that the less power one might feel over racism in their lives, the more they needed an outside force, in this case, religion, to make sense of their current suffering and to gain confidence.

Arial’s example shows how through religion young people were able to develop these vulnerable relationships with God, as well as find a higher sense of connection with this world.

Arial talked about identity and brought up the concept of home by referring to herself as a
“citizen of heaven”. She said, “I don’t belong here, my home is in heaven, so therefore I must live as a citizen of heaven. Here, I am just here temporarily.” This may demonstrate how identification with a community of faith made ethnoracial identity weaker when youth reduced the significance of, or even removed race out of the equation.

Interaction with God provided youth with the feeling of hope, and of being loved unconditionally. Arial spoke about God as an all-encompassing, perfect being who believes “all races are equal; all races are the same in the sight of God. He sees them all as beautiful.” This speaks to their need for a relationship which is warm, accepting and forgiving. Their interaction with the spiritual world promised that somewhere the love and equality between races actually exists, even if it is not in this world. Arial, like many other young people, emphasized the message that through God every human being feels accepted and safe.

5.3.3 Fostering a sense of collective healing

It seemed that emotional and spiritual coping strategies not only helped youth to meet their immediate emotional needs, but also helped them to find meaning in difficult situations as they had a sense of being a part of something bigger. For Arial, God provided her with a sense of belonging and not being alone because she was cognizant of how racial trauma causes feelings of isolation. The need for belonging revealed the collective nature of racial trauma that required collective responses and an awareness that they were not alone while dealing with difficult challenges. This collective sense of healing manifested through youth stories on religious beliefs, community, ethnic history, and music.

This knowledge that other people or former generations had also fought these oppressions gave youth a sense of shared human suffering and healing. For example, Arial found stories in the Bible that she resonated with and offered some hope. “I am not alone. People have survived
this”, she said, stressing that the Bible allowed her to feel surrounded by her community and experience the power in connection through shared meaning of social problems.

Arial found community ‘located’ in the Bible and said that “reading the Bible shows me that it’s not something that I deal with alone”. She compared her experiences of racism to the stories of suffering, which served as a reminder that people have been victims of discrimination in the past and have survived it. Arial recognized that she was equipped with better resources to deal with race-based stress, and, therefore, in some sense, felt that she must overcome whatever difficulty she faced: “I realize that, you know, all these things have happened to people before. If they’ve been able to… manage and cope with that [prejudice], then I certainly can.”

Similarly, Rebecca explored the ideas of togetherness noting that as a Christian, she was aware that Jesus “wasn’t accepted when he first came” and that example led her to conclude that suffering was unavoidable and was a part of life: “I cannot expect to be accepted by everyone or everything”. Therefore, Rebecca often managed racism by accepting it, lowering her expectations for change and entering her own safe space for a collective healing - in this case, a prayer - to achieve peace of mind and cultivate hope. This lowering of expectations demonstrated an increased tolerance toward impacts of race-based stress, and she further stated that by praying she realized that “the situation might not heal right away, but it is in a process, so that’s encouraging enough for me”.

The idea of collective and intergenerational aspects as a response to racism was mentioned by other youth as well. Collective healing through communal bonds helped them to overcome challenges and eventually, not only to find peace within themselves, but also to feel as part of a collective pain and strength, that ultimately mitigated their feeling of alienation. For Sandy, religion brought the notion of common humanity, which was especially relevant when tackling
racism. She emphasized that religion may help to melt the boundaries that racism creates. Sandy saw religion as all encompassing, which may be a path towards healing through a return to common humanity without racial differences, or, as Kevin adds, [just] “A human race”. Though she is not religious, Susan noted the value that religion may have by bringing forth the message that each individual can become more tolerant and open to another human being in the vein of “we’re all human, instead of you are white, you are Black or you are Asian, there will be no boundary between us”.

To feel protected by God or by the strength of previous generations was an invaluable resource that youth turned to when they felt unprotected. Susan described how South Asian identity and religious participation empowered her by giving her strength to face racism and helped her to believe in her ability to overcome it. Her source of healing was the Sikh religious bracelet, Kara, which not only had a calming effect and provided her an outlet to release stressful emotions, but also responded to the need of belonging and safety. Wearing religious symbols gives her a sense of endurance: “Just looking at it and having it around my wrist all the time reminds me that God is with me, I can get through anything, and that ‘impossible’ is nothing.” Eva emphasized the benefits of connecting with people with similar experience and having the opportunity to share stories with mutual experience.

The collective aspect of healing was also mentioned by youth when they spoke about the healing properties of music. Susan noted that listening to the lyrics of a song helped her relate to someone else’s experiences. The following quote clearly illustrates how listening to music benefited youth by fostering their sense of belonging and connectedness:

For me, like I said, music is pretty healing and … it’s a good way to, I think, express your feeling. Just like listening to someone else’s vent and share your own experiences, who’s
sharing their experiences with you, which you have now experienced by listening to the music. So, I think it’s a great way when you are just listening, and a song is all about healing, so usually at the end of the song, you know, people have gotten through it. It’s kind of like a mini story, like a four-minute story, right. So, in the end usually it’s a good outcome, not a waste, but usually you can see how, you know, I can see the sunshine after the rain, type of thing, you know. Okay, they experience it, now they heal, and they did this, you know, I can get through it too. So there’s a lot like hope in the music. – Daisy

Sandy indicated how music benefits racialized communities by making them feel connected with the rest of the world while also dissolving the boundary between different groups. She said: “I think music is an international thing. It’s an international language and that helps with the racial thing, too”. Catherine agreed with that and added that the power of music having a uniting function lies under its potential to be understood and shared despite difference. In her words, “music can be enjoyed internationally and worldwide and you don’t need to understand it to enjoy it, so… I really agree with that point.”

Ada mentioned music as a strategy that provided her access to new connections with her ethnoracial identity as she listens to Chinese music. This quote illustrates what Ada said, I’ve never been to Asia, I’ve never been to China, but I feel like… I am closer to my culture and to my past, almost like I can sort of find, kind of string in where I am coming from through that music. So, I mean it’s not even religious or ancient whatever music, it’s pop music, … Chinese pop music, but I love how music is really a universal language.

It was with pride that youth identified the strength of their ancestors by acknowledging their suffering. Frank indicated that his heritage keeps him strong. Susan alluded to the suffering of her ancestors who fought for Sikhism to be alive. As she said, for her “it’s kind of just a
reminder not to take anything for granted … and just be happy with what you have, that kind of thing”. For her, listening to the stories of elders minimized significance of her own experiences of racism as “these are pretty minor comparing to what a lot of elderly people have dealt with”.

Further, youth identified benefits of having space to share stories of oppression with other ethnoracial minority groups. Through connection with others with shared experiences of racism, youth gained validation that their feelings matter, which perhaps helped them to feel less alone. As Susan put it, “it might be bad to say … but you are not the only one that deals with it”. She further elaborated how sharing and being heard is healing as she reflected on a focus group activity in the research:

At first, I didn’t really… I just had couple things in mind, just speaking about what happened in the past. But then after sitting there and hearing other people’s stories, it reminded me of similar things, stuff like that. So, I think it definitely helped to have more than just myself there.

<…> I could hear other people’s responses as well. Because I got to see how everybody’s views and experiences are different. <…> It is interesting to see other people’s stories and how they are affected by stuff. That is why I enjoyed sharing so much, because it is not like you sitting and talking, but… it got you thinking. And it did get you to heal a little bit. It is just knowing that you are not… it’s sad to say…, but you are not the only one that is affected by it. – Susan

Yvonne agreed how gaining more awareness of racism and sharing experiences with others empowered by merely letting racist encounters be named and acknowledged. In her words:

Even if a lot of people, a lot of youth these days they say ‘oh you know racism does not exist as much anymore, it’s not as big of a deal these days, it’s not as prevalent’, I don’t
know if that’s necessarily true, because when I came into the discussion, I thought, ‘oh, that does not happen to me that much’, you don’t think about it, but as soon as you start hearing about it, people start thinking, ‘oh, wait, I did go through something similar like this’. So that just shows that everyone I know has been a victim of racism. – Yvonne

Similar reports emphasized the importance of naming racism, sharing stories and ensuring the voices of those affected by racism are heard. It also shows how silence and denial of racism became a part of racialized youth, who internalized the denial of racism as their lived experience. Conversely, the collective healing experience, allowed their stories to be acknowledged and provided space for healing.

5.3.4 Tools for releasing feelings

Racism triggered a range of feelings in youth, such as hopelessness, self-doubt, guilt, indifference, despair, unfairness, loneliness, and betrayal. In this section I share how youth responded to these distressing emotions by utilizing several internal coping strategies meaningful to them.

Eva talked about how she expressed her emotions by writing them down. She had a box at home, in which she would put notes she wrote when feeling sad. Lily said that reading a book provided her with safety and comfort. Frank noted the self-work he has done, and the incorporation of coping tools, like counting to ten when in distress and practising awareness in noticing his emotions. In his words,

To be able to be in that space when you are aware that you are getting upset. So you have presence of mind to be able to control yourself and your emotions. You can’t really be responsible for anyone else’s actions, regardless of how hard you try and even if you know them very well. - Frank
All participants acknowledged the healing power of music. Frank shared that “music is super healing” and that: “[it] helps me to … process my emotions faster”. Jessica stressed that her choice of music was congruent with her mood as she would listen to “loud, bass music when [she is] mad”. Once feelings were released, she would listen to classical music for its calming effects. This resonated with Susan, who also emphasized the cathartic function of music and the power that it had on her emotions, noting that:

It can either make me feel really down, it can make me feel really happy, can make me angry, can make me sad in just a matter of seconds. Just by the song that I play, like there’s different types of music, like there’s hip-hop, there’s R&B, there’s rock, there’s country, there’s gospel, anything and just like the type of music you’re listening to.

In addition to listening to music, both Sunny and Kate utilized singing as a way of seeking tranquility. Sunny, as a way of dealing with the emotional consequences of racism, sang songs of praise, which seemed to have a calming effect on his over active nervous system:

That could be a word or … if something makes me upset, or if I am really angry about something, … I will just sing it in my head. <…> To me, it’s more about praising God in my head. I just sing praise, I just sing songs and it just calms me down.

Susan and Eva talked about dancing as their way to release emotions and detach themselves from negative experiences. In Eva’s words:

Actually, music makes you forget a lot of things. If you’re in a bad mood, you listen to music, you forget everything and feel happy and released. You have this stuff that’s going on, keeping in your heart, but when you listen to music, it’s just like… I love kind of losing myself in music a lot.
The power of visualization and embodied expression in healing from the impact of racist violence was implied by Ervin as he described his experience of performing a skit that depicted such an encounter. Through the dramatization of a desired outcome, he was able to be proud of experiencing a positive outcome of his lived reality. In his own words,

The skit definitely released some of my emotions on how I felt about racism. Doing the skit was the way of venting off hurtful things. It definitely makes it more concrete, you can see ‘oh, this is the example of racial violence’. Otherwise, when we talk about it, it’s hard to visualize what is racial violence. But when you see in the skit like that, then you think, ‘oh yes, that’s exactly how racial violence is’. I like the way we responded to it, how my character responded to it, but at the same time was kind of… I mean yeah, I stood up for myself and for what I thought was wrong, the way I was being treated and how my character has been treated, so I thought that was pretty nice, I like the way how we organized the script to be that way.

Frank gave another example of why internally managing his anger when he heard the n-word was important to him, but he also emphasized that it takes effort to contain these feelings. He talked about having friends who found it hard not to react when hearing the n-word; how, if they heard it from a man, then they will get into a fight; and if it was a girl, they would just yell at her. Either way, it would be hard to hold back:

I have some friends who don’t believe in hitting a woman no matter what, but I think if it were a situation like that ever presents to them, they will see it as not male or female, but who are overstepping their balance completely. I don’t know if they would get physical or not, I hope they would be mature enough not to, but… it is one of those things when you kind of never know.
This example shows youth attempts to contain violence even if it is an act of resistance as a response to it; and the extent to which the onus is on the one who is the target of racism to not react to provocations, perhaps doing so by minimizing the impact that the verbal assault had on them. While being aware of the negative outcomes and potential violence that can come with direct, physical confrontation, Frank decided to work on not letting racist incidents and remarks affect him as intensely as they had in the past. He said, “I made a New Year’s resolution this year to not take it personally every time when I hear someone say an n-word, just because I hear, sometimes, more frequently than others.”

Frank also talked about the importance of allyship, which he described in a story about how his friends would step up for him. Having an ally to step in on his behalf provided Frank with a sense of safety and helped him feel calm. This shows why it is so important for white people to address white supremacy, which removes the burden to respond from racialized individuals. Frank described his story:

My close friends, non-Black, if someone would make any racist comments… For example, I have one friend, we are very close, like brothers basically. Anyone else would make a comment, he would be right at him, no one would stop him. He would probably be one of the people I could stop him from getting into a fight or control him. He definitely keeps me calm. I am calm, but there are definitely times when I wanna lose it, although I know best is not to get physical. - Frank

This example is quite distinct from previously mentioned situations, namely, racist encounters at school, when students were left to fight racism alone, which only exacerbated their loneliness. The following subsection explores the consequences of those feelings remaining stuck.
5.3.5 Indelible marks

Despite youth unanimously agreeing that turning towards internal resources is an important strategy to deal with racism, they also raised the concern that focusing on their own feelings prevented the issue of racism from being named and resolved in a direct way. Therefore, according to youth, they found that their emotions often got stored in their memory and became a felt sense that youth tried to contain.

Yvonne described how when racist instances happen, emotional self-regulation helped in the moment as “feelings will eventually go away, diffuse over time”, but as soon as similar experiences showed up, all the feelings were reactivated again. In her words,

Yeah, you can talk about it, it will go away for a while, but as soon as something happens again, it may or may not trigger… and like as you get there, you feel something. I am sure it would trigger it again, the same feelings. But momentarily, when it initially happens, it is just keeping an open mind, thinking about being in other person’s shoes, sometimes it helps.

Wilson discussed his strategies to minimize the effects of racism and how he would try to forget the negative experience by suppressing his feelings. He used a metaphor of a pencil and an eraser to illustrate the impact of racism and dealing with it. Catherine, on the other hand, acknowledged that racist encounters leave a mark, regardless of how hard one tries to forget it. Wilson’s metaphor is even better than he realized because, as Catherine pointed out, one can’t erase away the feeling completely. A mark is left from pressing too hard. Racism leaves an indelible mark that is easily revived when there are other racist incidents. The following dialogue illustrates their experiences:
Wilson: When someone says something bad to you or they make a rude comment, then you sort of remember it, so it’s like a pencil, you write on a piece of paper and you always remember that and it’s always there. But then, for healing, I use eraser because when you erase it, you just don't... forget or it doesn’t matter anymore. You don’t see it as a big thing anymore. <…> … sometimes I just forget it. But then... or over time I just don’t see it as a big problem, I guess.

Catherine: For me, I try to forget it but sometimes it’s just still there, right. There’s still a mark. It’s like pressing too hard on the paper.

In the same vein, Susan shared that even if she was not in favour of “snapping right back or start yelling” in racist encounters, she also identified the negative consequences of suppressing emotions, as unprocessed feelings may get stuck and show up unexpectedly. She said,

It’s not good to keep it bottling up inside, because one day you will explode. <…> And sometimes, you know, that’s not always a good thing, because you might actually scare people.

What these coping strategies convey is the underlying needs of those who experienced racism. It demonstrates how using containment to deal with racism in social arenas does not help youth emotional well-being as it left a mark which can be triggered easily.

5.4 Summary

When youth reported challenges that they faced in attempts to speak up for themselves, it seemed that they were battling the denial of racism, particularly, the dominant groups’ inability to admit that racism exists. The previous finding chapter outlined how racism, when it is not acknowledged, becomes normalized, routinely exercised, with only those who are targets of racism able to identify it. In this chapter I tried to capture how youth responded to racism, and
what their stories revealed was the pervasiveness of denial. These mechanisms of denial had a
detrimental impact on ethnoracial minorities, often leading to a sense of familiarity and
normalization of racism – all of which created barriers to challenge it. Denial was especially
dangerous as it delegitimized any opportunity for youth to fight back, because any attempt to
challenge the status quo seemed to threaten the interest of white dominance. Youth responses to
racist acts towards them, and racism in general, demonstrated various ways that dominant groups
‘do’ racism and how youth are conditioned to be non-threatening to the structures of dominance.
The accounts illustrated in this chapter clearly showed how forms of structural oppression
manifest through interpersonal interactions.
Chapter 6: Discussion

This study sought to understand resilience for ethnoracial minority youth in Vancouver who reported having experienced racism. It is a response to the demands identified in a literature for critical approaches to resilience, concerning communities impacted by systemic oppression (e.g., Evans & Reid, 2013; O’Brien, 2014; Schwarz, 2018; Webster & Rivers, 2019; Zembylas, 2021). Building on existing theories of resilience, it proposes a new way of looking at this concept in the context of racialized youth experiences.

Learning from the stories of this group of young people, I contend that resilience, as a widely used construct in academic literature and within practical domains, has the potential to advance our understanding of well-being among racialized communities, especially when it is viewed in consideration of social inequalities and social change. Therefore, in this work the construct of resilience is operationalized according to Ungar’s (2011) ecological view and understood as a relational process. It encompasses individual capacities to access and maintain healthy resources and the extent to which their social environments provide meaningful supports. My analysis of youth stories revealed sociohistorical and sociopolitical conditions that impede or facilitate resilience in the specific circumstances of ethnoracial minority youth as told by the participants themselves. The findings of this study highlight the tensions and mechanisms that shape the ways youth make choices in the presence of racism and demonstrate how they negotiate protective resources available to them to tackle racism-related adversities. Experiences of risk and resilient adjustment are analyzed from the perspective of participating youth with an emphasis on their own construction of meanings of vulnerability and what the concept of thriving means to them.
This study advances existing resilience and racism scholarship by drawing from multidisciplinary theories as it situates youth-constructed knowledge within the fields of social work, psychology, and education. To understand contextual aspects of resilience for ethnoracial youth, I build my analysis on influences of critical race theory (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2010; Clay, 2019; Dei, 2013), works of Frank Fanon, D.E.B. Du Bois, Stuart Hall, Iris Marion Young and Homi Bhabha, as well as the ecological approach to resilience proposed by Ungar (2011). The findings of this study inform critical race theory by offering a perspective of resilience, which is concerned with the ways through which individuals and communities resist and deal with racial oppression. Additionally, it highlights the complex interplay between personal coping and community-level protective factors as they shape resilience for ethnoracialized young people. Further, the findings advance the theory of resilience by illustrating how the social and physical ecologies facilitate meaningful protective resources for them when dealing with adversity.

Specifically, my research offers important insights into ethnoracial youth perspectives, calling attention to the critical and anti-oppressive view of the processes of resilience. My research reveals that social environments fell short in providing them with protection, support and meaningful resources to effectively deal with racism. Instead, these young people were left to navigate these adversities on their own, and to develop competencies that helped them to meet the demands of dominant criteria that define ‘successful adaptation’. However, this often meant that racial discrimination remained unchallenged. Therefore, learning from these stories, I propose that resilience for these youth may be conceptualized as their capacity to assess when and how to challenge everyday racism when their environments provide little protective resources for them to deal with these racist encounters.
In this chapter, I will address four major findings that emerged from the accounts of ethnoracial youth in Vancouver that illustrate my theorization of resilience. First, according to the participants in this study, the roots of systemic racism are hidden under the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism, which often masks the issues of racial discrimination and, therefore, dismisses their experiences. This, in turn, leads to the myth that protective resources are unnecessary. Second, to live and ‘thrive’ in a racially divided society, racialized individuals should have an awareness of their hyphenated identity with respect to discrimination and privilege to develop this competence to evaluate their environments. Third, in their circumstances of experiencing racism, expressions of resilient responses to racism for these oppressed communities meant taking sole responsibility for diffusing racist encounters and turning to resources within to protect their well-being and to attend to their needs. Despite all the efforts to address racism with calculative coping strategies, the participants felt that their cultural communities had limited opportunities to support them in fighting the system. Fourth, I will discuss the implications of these findings for existing resilience theory and provide insights into a new conceptualization of this construct.

6.1 Democratic racism: the contradictions and paradoxes of multiculturalism in Canada

In this section, I address the environment youth live in and the impacts of the official Canadian concept of national multiculturalism as it creates and perpetuates racism, makes it invisible and silences youth from addressing racial discrimination. Youth stories help us gain a deeper understanding of everyday racism in Canada that is manifested through contextual requirements and normative guidelines imposed on youth to allow them to 'successfully' function in societal structures.
Specifically, participants shared the unique aspects of racism in Vancouver, rooted in a Canadian multiculturalism ideology, as they recounted the negative effects of this ideology on their daily lives at the personal, familial, and community levels. Their stories revealed a disconnection between the ‘official’ image of ethnoracial communities in the public discourse and their actual lived experiences. Participants expressed confusion about the notions of inclusion, diversity, and implied ideals about the ‘post racial’ era because all of these notions did not reflect their experiences.

This section is divided into four parts covering the significant concerns related to the multicultural environment: 1) facing the denial of racism; 2) bystanders’ silence; 3) the ‘everydayness’ of racism hidden under the façade of niceness; and 4) the issue of segregation. These aspects highlight the contextual nuances of adversities that inform the ecological understanding of resilience.

6.1.1 Facing the denial of racism

Canadian multiculturalism contributes to society’s denial of racism, which creates additional challenges related to reporting racial discrimination, leading to a situation where racialized people would minimize or deny being targets of it. Minimization or using euphemisms have been noted as common forms of denial of racism in the literature (e.g., Van Dijk, 1992). Kaiser and Major (2006) note that the societal denial of racism prevents ethnoracial groups from reporting discrimination, as their review suggests that individuals minimize or deny discrimination because it is denied by society at large. From this perspective, it is not surprising that youth in this study often minimized racist experiences or did not acknowledge racist incidents for what they actually truly were - they feared they just did not have the evidence to support what they felt.
A societal denial of racism leads to microaggressions that ‘felt like racism’, an experience that was clearly not perceived as such by the majority, thereby creating conditions that made youth doubt their own reality. Again, in the multicultural context where the dominant definition of racism is a ‘very bad behaviour’ or ‘something that does not exist’ in Canadian society, one must be very careful when naming it for what it is as they may face the consequences for questioning one’s good intentions. This brings up the notion of Du Bois’ (1903) “double consciousness”, which is illustrated by how young people had to think both for themselves, who clearly see or feel what’s happening, and the white person, for whom racism is not visible or who is anxious about needing to be seen as a ‘decent citizen’. The discourse of denial then leads to the erasure of the minorities’ experiences. I will elaborate on the implications of the denial of youth identity in the second section of the discussion.

Canada is proud of being a democratic and racism-free society, especially in comparison to the United States (Soltani, 2017). However, participants who have lived in both countries noted that they often felt more racism in Vancouver than in the US. One of the notable differences, in their view, was that people in Canada do not want to acknowledge that racism exists and often cite multiculturalism as its ‘proof’. Therefore, racism becomes hidden and often expressed through non-verbal communication, which is, again, very challenging to call attention to and articulate. Van Dijk (1992), who examined the discourse of a denial of racism, points out that “those who deny that they are racist usually imply that they conform with the general, official group norm that prohibits racism, and that, therefore, they are decent citizens” (p. 91). This phenomenon of clear normative guidelines was evident in youth perceptions of multiculturalism.

The participants’ stories reinforce what has been argued by Canadian critical multiculturalism scholars – that in this ideology, denial exists because racism is not readily seen
by those groups who are not impacted by it. Individuals who are privileged from whiteness tend to deny that racism exists; they argue that ideals of diversity and inclusion eradicate racism, thereby the discussions of race and racism are treated as no longer relevant anymore, especially in a neoliberal context (Walcott, 2019). My findings indicate how this colour evasiveness narrative perpetuated racial inequality and made the young people feel powerless. It ignored how white privilege and racism shape the experiences of racialized communities and, most importantly, maintained the status quo. In addition, the notion that multiculturalism exists to resolve racism may contribute to why studies of racism and resilience in Canadian society remain scarce.

To describe these nuanced forms of multicultural racism that are specific to Canadian society, Frances Henry coined the term “democratic racism”, an ideology manifested by the conflict between commitment to values of democratic society (justice, fairness) and maintaining negative attitudes towards racialized people, which results in unfair treatment of them (Tator & Henry, 2010). Henry’s argument aligns with the findings of my study that Canada, on the surface, appears to be a democratic and just society, but in reality, it perpetuates racist practices through education, immigration policies and/or the criminal justice system (Henry, 2002; Tator & Henry, 2010). As a result of this mismatch, the participants discussed Vancouver-specific examples of racism in the context of the contradictions and paradoxes of multiculturalism that do not live up to its promises. This neoliberal framework is constructed in a manner that fails to challenge the colonial structure of Canada; instead of addressing racism on a structural scale, it imagines racism as merely a matter of morality and therefore does not allow for acknowledgment of racialized experiences.
This erasure of racism was revealed in youth stories as colour evasiveness or confusing definitions of what counts as racism, and it often led to silence in the presence of racial discrimination, which is discussed in the following subsection.

6.1.2 Unveiling the silence in the presence of racism

Another contextual factor that really hurt the participants during racist encounters was bystanders’ silence, which subsequently led them to internalize and hide their experiences. Specifically, participants gave examples of how teachers’ silence in the face of racism was more hurtful than racism itself. The youth noted how educational institutions generally perpetuated marginalization by failing to protect students of colour and how schoolteachers and principals let racially-oppressed students down. Silence is an emblematic example of the absence of protective resources for resilience.

Teachers’ hesitation or failure to intervene or educate students on racism demonstrated that they may not be well equipped to approach these conversations in a culturally sensitive way. According to stories in the present study, ethnoracial students needed to see teachers’ solidarity; they needed to feel that they belong in their classrooms; they needed to be accepted as authentic human beings who are proud of their ethnoracial background without being perceived as ‘lacking’ or the ‘other’. Notably, students preferred that schools acknowledge ongoing racial oppression and promote interventions based on equity rather than perpetuating the ideas of ‘treating everyone equally’, the notion that is based on the race evasiveness narrative.

My findings highlight the significant factor for the ecological understanding of resilience which is that educational institutions’ inability to protect them shaped how participants themselves dealt with unjust treatment. Important in assessing racism-related risks is the fact that unacknowledged and unchallenged discrimination left students feeling alone to navigate
unspoken and unwritten rules in the class. In the presence of unfair treatment, they were required to attune to the dominant values of silence; from this context, they learned early on that one needs to have overwhelming evidence that a situation was racist before it was seen as such by the public.

The stories of participants consistently reveal that racism seems to exist within the realm of imagination. According to Soltani (2017), the idea of the Canadian imagination of a tolerant “non-racist society” is so pervasive that it leads to not seeing racism at all, or if it happens, interpreting it as an individual act that is either unintentional or the behaviour of ‘one bad apple’. This view has detrimental effects on racially marginalized groups as it leaves them with no options to call out racism without disturbing “the national identity of tolerance and niceness” (Kubota, 2015, p. 8). This is how silence becomes a norm that youth had to integrate to function in Canadian society.

6.1.3 “It happens everywhere”: lived everydayness of racism

The reality of the ‘everydayness’ of racism was an illuminating theme shared by youth in this study. These experiences left them with a sense of powerlessness and feeling invisible, oftentimes with no access to meaningful health-sustaining resources as highlighted above. When racism occurred in such an unspoken, subtle way and is reinforced by a colour-evasiveness or denial narrative, the youth confronted situations where they were unable to articulate or locate racism because of the difficulty in pinpointing it, and yet these unjust experiences were their reality that was so deeply embedded in everyday life. This kind of commonality maintained the hegemony and, in turn, obscured the youth’s capacity to assess when and how to respond. In one participant’s words, it became like “a background noise”.

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The findings of my study show that youth consistently experienced overt and covert forms of discrimination in various public spaces. This is not a surprising discovery as the instances of racism in Canada have been widely documented in the literature (see Cénat, Hajizadeh, et al., 2022; Godley, 2018; Houshmand et al., 2019; Korzinski, 2021). Specifically, this group of youth reported openly racist messages seen in washrooms, in interactions over phone text messages, and/or racist encounters with police. More hidden forms of racism occurred in restaurants, workplaces, or in relationships with friends, neighbours or school authorities. The participants talked about frequent microaggressions and experiences of being othered. Consistent with the previous literature (e.g., Soltani, 2017), hidden forms of racism were especially prevalent and hurtful, and therefore they were most difficult to challenge. According to youth stories, the only way to challenge everyday racism that is expressed subtly and unconsciously is by first making it visible, which, in multicultural reality, makes it a complicated endeavour.

6.1.4 The facade of inclusion: ‘celebrating’ difference or segregation?

Another aspect of multiculturalism that was evident in participants’ experiences was a so-called ‘difference and diversity’ paradigm. Youth felt that there is too much focus in a multicultural context on differences within the communities rather than similarities among people. Even if the context implies the narratives of ‘celebrating cultures’ or ‘celebrating differences’, it actually leads to practices focused on separation and othering, based on youth stories. They felt that this divisive tendency was a major contributing risk factor to their racialized experience, which created a feeling of immobilization. Hall’s (2010) argument in his work on ethnic identity is useful here to understand youth experiences of feeling separated even in the context where they are ‘recognized’:
Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning. (p. 4)

This is a precise description of the struggle that youth spoke of as they felt left out and ‘othered’ in different ways depending on different contexts. In the multicultural paradigm, they reported living an ascribed identity of a minority with presumed characteristics prescribed by the dominant group. The emerging stories revealed that by rendering ethnoracial groups as different, the oppressive structures of white hegemonic systems seem to remain neutral, stable and untouchable. In contrast, everyone that is not white is seen as ‘the other’. To understand this segregation, Ahmed’s (2006) words may be useful here: “In a way, if Whiteness becomes what is ‘above,’ then Whiteness is what allows some bodies to move ‘upward’” (p. 137). With respect to diversity and inclusion, Walcott (2019) argues, “recognition is not enough even when rights seem to flow from it. The structural nature of the society remains unchanged while still reproducing domination as its fundamental form of relations” (p. 396).

As the participants questioned the ideas of diversity and the performative nature of multiculturalism, their experiences showed that these ideas only create an illusion of inclusion and solidarity. Furthermore, they encourage more division by creating racial enclaves. To illustrate, one of the notable challenges young people faced in Vancouver concerned the geographical, racial divide in schools and their neighbourhoods, where groups occupied certain areas to ‘stick together’ in their own communities. My findings suggest that youth had
designated spaces in their neighbourhoods that defined their belonging, exclusion or inclusion; they constantly navigated segregated spaces, and it seemed almost impossible for them to cross the divide. Differences in expressions of racism were noted among racialized groups. In particular, lacking a sense of belonging was mentioned by Black youth; being part of only a small Black community in Vancouver, they did not have a ‘designated’ neighbourhood, and therefore they found it challenging to fit in among other ethnoracial groups. Chinese or South Asian youth, on the other hand, often were part of ethnic enclaves and were associated with specific areas in the city and in the schools where they were expected to be, regardless of their wishes and needs. Chinese youth felt that they were made invisible by being excluded from normative peer interactions and being pushed to the margins of the ‘Asian model minority’. They often felt rendered invisible or sometimes placed in a dominant category of the model minority stereotype. Prior research on the model minority myth described similar ways to essentialize Asian Americans through their academic achievements (Pyke & Dang, 2003; Yi et al., 2020; Yip, 2018).

Similar issues of a lack of belonging have been noted by Henry (2002), for instance, who discussed racial segregation as being a significant problem in Canada highlighting how segregation reinforces racial inequality by limiting opportunities and access to resources for racialized communities, such as those crucial for resilience. Also, Walcott (2019) problematized the notion of diversity by saying that “The invocation of diversity is meant to suggest that the work of “race equity” is being done and that representation is being worked for, but such assumptions can obscure exactly who is being included and represented” (p. 397).

Through the practices of ‘celebrating cultures’ youth experienced othering and felt excluded from shared spaces. Even if they were ‘tolerated’ and ‘granted access’ to certain
spaces, this inclusion was not on their terms; instead, access was determined by white people. In order to be invited to these white dominant spaces, youth had to meet a well-defined cultural standard, a marker of resilience outcome. These divisions based on how far one is from the dominant standard often show up through the patterns of “normalization”, described by Young (2006) as “a set of social processes that elevate the experience and capacities of some social segments into standards used to judge everyone” (p. 95).

A significant finding for resilience as collective resistance is that this divisiveness made the youth feel misplaced and different not only from the dominant white group, but also from other ethnoracial minorities. Youth disclosed that they generally did not talk about racism with other racially oppressed groups. They seem to perceive other racialized groups as ‘different’ than them, perhaps perpetuating the narrative created by whiteness that sees ‘the other’ in everyone who does not fit ‘the normative category’. As Young (2011) points out, “Oppression has often been perpetrated by a conceptualization of group difference in terms of unalterable essential natures that determine what group members deserve or are capable of, and that excludes groups so entirely from one another that they have no similarities or overlapping attributes.” (p. 47). In keeping with this statement, youth reflections demonstrate that although it is very important to be mindful of the nuances and complexities of how every ethnoracial group is impacted by racism, it is also important to understand what unites them and how oppression operates. Therefore, in my study, I prioritize the complexities of lived experiences and highlight that all ethnoracial groups are differentially impacted by racism. I also acknowledge that looking at lived experiences specific to each ethnoracial group may be a form of essentializing and homogenizing those groups. However, solely assessing the patterns and variations among experiences of different groups may distract us from detecting the similar ways that minority groups are
impacted by cultural imperialism; being stereotyped, labelled, or made invisible. Youth were facing oppression that operates through cultural imperialism, which means “to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (Young, 2011, p. 59). Essentially, this study contributed to understanding youth experience and resilience by focusing on the patterns through which oppression is reconstructed, and hegemonies are maintained.

The fact that this group of youth did not share the experiences of racial oppression with other marginalized groups indicates that they learn about other oppressed communities from the narrative created by the dominant group, as Young (2011) calls it, the “normative gazer”. This seems to be a profoundly problematic by-product of so-called diversity, the characteristic of multiculturalism, which may lead to “members of culturally imperialized groups [to] fear and despise members of other oppressed groups” (Young, 2011, p. 147).

This finding about oppressed groups being conditioned toward separation may explain why identifying discrimination may be challenging for youth. If they do not talk about it with other racialized groups, they have few opportunities to know that other racialized individuals may have similar experiences. Separating the lived experiences of racism of each racialized group may create an illusion of reduced numbers in how prevalent racism is. This, in turn, may lead to what Kaiser & Major (2006) warn: that singular experiences that are not shared with other groups may be a barrier to reporting discrimination and providing “evidence”.

It seems that the policies of official multiculturalism not only created conditions for youth to feel separated from other racialized groups, but some youth also noted that they experienced racism from those groups, in some cases, more frequently than from white peers. These
occurrences may be explained by the notion of “racial triangulation” (Kim, 1999, 2022), a concept that describes how different ethnoracial groups are positioned in relation to one another in a society divided by race. Yi et al. (2020) used Kim’s ideas to speak about the model minority myth and how Asian American groups “have been used to blame other communities of colour for racial inequalities and racially excluded from many aspects of society” (p. 549). These tensions of exclusion and belonging were also evident in the stories of Chinese youth that highlighted their changing racial positions. Sometimes they would occupy positions of being seen as ‘closer to’ the norm of whiteness, while other times, they were rendered invisible or inferior to whites, or they experienced racism from other racialized groups. Yi et al. (2020) highlight that this type of stereotyping affects not only Asian communities, but other racialized groups as well.

To look back at Fanon’s (2004/1961) take on relationship and violence among oppressed groups, he claims that colonized populations erupt into “fighting between tribes, clans, and individuals” in search of an outlet for the repressed colonial violence they are forced to suppress (p. 17). Fanon, as well as others, also highlight how internalized racism is one of the psychological impacts of oppression that leads to feelings of inferiority and self-hatred and can manifest itself through perpetuating oppression against their own or other marginalized groups.

The multicultural ideology that celebrating cultural differences and diversity means justice and the end of racism is, paradoxically, a contributing factor in creating additional adversities related to racism. The result of these beliefs is, as Young (2011) asserts, that with the commitment for equality and inclusion, racism and other forms of oppression tend to hide “underground, dwelling in everyday habits and cultural meanings of which people are, for the most part, unaware” (p. 124).
To summarize this section, it seems that participants felt that multicultural ideology operates subconsciously by embedding racism in their everyday lives in a nuanced and subtle form. While living in an environment that is shaped by multicultural beliefs and its impacts, they felt powerless because they recognized that multiculturalism, despite being so valued by Canadians, contributes to racism; however, its effects are often visible only to minority groups. They recognize that this created a narrative of the (in)visibility of racism that is perpetuated by the larger systems. Therefore, to make meaningful changes, the entire system needs to change. However, systemic change is not easy. Instead, as discerned from the stories, racialized youth tend to learn how to adjust and adapt to circumstances beyond their control without structural support.

6.1.5 Necessary awareness of a hyphenated identity

What adaptation to the multicultural environment meant for this group of youth was to have a certain capacity to navigate racialized spaces despite their lived experience often being misrepresented or erased. To be recognized in the spaces divided by race, youth needed to have an awareness of the cultural standard so they could present themselves as ‘model citizens’ in the context in which they live. These adjustments required creativity, courage, persistence, and profound awareness. But for the most part, it required developing self-knowledge accessed through the eyes of another.

To analyze this finding, I will use Du Bois (1903) concept of “double consciousness”, i.e., “a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 3). With reference to Du Bois, Alcoff (2019) explains the tension between the public self/lived subjectivity. For Alcoff (219), this tension can be understood by the
process of a dialectical self-formation. From this theoretical perspective, it is not surprising how common the idea of ‘self-formation’ was throughout youth stories while they navigated the tension between ‘how I see myself’ and ‘how others see me’. In turn, this tension eventually shaped youth motivations and how they wanted to show up in the world. By combining their lived experiences with their public self, using Alcoff’s conceptualization, youth demonstrated their capacity to assess the situations in the moment and to navigate sources for their well-being.

The participants often used improvisational navigation when they had to make decisions about how and when to fit in, or they had to evaluate which cultural cues to respond to. In Du Bois’ terms, this process of “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”, through which the marginalized individuals are trying “to merge their double self into a better and truer self” (p. 3) and to be both, or, as Du Bois puts it, to live in this “two-ness”. This fitting in, and adjusting to the standard seemed to be such a natural process that, at times, it appeared that the participants did not even realize what their motivations were and why they were doing the things they did. It seemed that they demonstrated how learned patterns that proved to be useful to ‘succeed’ in the past helped them to navigate spaces of everyday racism. Identity negotiations were happening almost on a subconscious level when youth were not always noticing the intentions behind it in the moment. In some of the stories it was evident that these learned responses have also been reinforced throughout their childhood and adolescence by their own culture.

The capacity to decide what parts of their identity to reveal appeared so deeply ingrained that it operated like a template to use with everything around them, such as schools that foster and perpetuate the status quo or neighbours that default to shunning before being welcoming. For example, as one participant quoted their neighbour, “We did not know what kind of Black people you are”. Living with this awareness, in some sense, youth were constantly navigating their
identity, because the ‘templates’ they followed and the expectations they faced were embedded in societal structures at the community, school, and interpersonal levels. It appeared that such templates were also embedded subconsciously, constituting part of their socialization, for example, through their parents and grandparents. From the societal messages they received, these young people knew that they could not show up in any other way than what was expected from them if they wanted to be included and accepted. This awareness was a significant factor that influenced how youth responded to racial discrimination, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

One such strategy to blend into English-speaking culture was the practice of choosing an English name in order to avoid exclusion, the quintessential example of which is being better able to compete in the job market. This was prevalent among Chinese and South Asian youth, as their given names were the focal point in their experiences of racism. This meant that maintaining a connection with their ethnic group through keeping their names became a kind of impossibility. This created tension between the bond with one’s culture and the need to fit in to the dominant one.

The process of becoming enmeshed with dominant values while minimizing one’s own culture can be explained with Homi Bhabha’s (1994) concept of “colonial mimicry” by which marginalized individuals imitate the oppressor to gain a sense of power, agency and control. Bhabha says that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p. 122). Youth may not think too much about the significance of changing their names at the time of doing it. If one changes their name to a ‘white’/English name thinking it is just a simple act to make it easier for someone else to pronounce, they are making a conscious calculation that will give them certain privileges.
This process may be explained by what Ofelia Schutte calls “invisibilization” to gain credibility (in Alcoff, 2019, p. 270); Schutte shares her experiences when she writes, “[I] perform the invisibilization myself, on myself”. For Bhabha, this imitation is a form of resistance and active negotiation as it allows the racialized person to recognize the rules of an oppressor and the ability to use them. However, it is important to keep in mind that even though some might think of name changing simply as a short cut to gain access to power or avoid discrimination, ultimately this act may also pose risks to youth such as losing connection with their community or a sense of belonging (see Kasinitz, 2016, 2019; Zhou, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 2020).

Other modifications that youth made to their identities based on their self-knowledge through the eyes of the dominant group was smiling, learning the language, withholding their thoughts, or containing feelings about a racist encounter. Perhaps, with these adjustments, they attempted to remain themselves in their “two-ness”, in Du Bois’ terms. This divided, or double self may also be explained with Homi Bhabha’s concept of “in-betweenness”, referring to a racialized person being positioned in between their home and host cultures. The idea of ‘in-betweenness’ showed up in this study frequently when youth navigated their identity between their own and Canadian cultures. For example, Chinese youth demonstrated this concept of ‘in-betweenness’ by learning the language and trying not to remain steeped in their ‘Chineseness’. It is important to note that these efforts to separate themselves from the rest of their community at times resulted in a divide within their ethnoracial group as well as a sense of ‘not belonging’.

With awareness of how they are stereotyped, youth recognized that often they would be ‘celebrated’ by the dominant culture when they were not a ‘typical’ member of their ethnoracial group; in other words, when they were an exception to the existing stereotype. So, youth tried to
separate themselves from their culture’s common stereotype or any characteristics pertaining to their ethnoracial group that are not desirable characteristics in the mainstream culture. This kind of separation is possible because of their taking up of what Fanon (2008/1967) describes as “false consciousness”. According to Fanon, marginalized groups tend to adopt the values and attitudes of the dominant groups and start seeing the world and themselves through the eyes of the oppressor. In this regard, distancing themselves from their own cultural beliefs (especially the ones that are seen as inferior and ‘lacking’) can be explained by their desire to gain approval and recognition.

According to the results of this study, Black youth, for example, would be more likely to assert their identity as “not a stereotypical Black person”, especially when they talked about some Black people being involved in violence and being easily triggered by racist comments. Other times they expressed their ethnoracial pride and educated others about Black culture (i.e., “Black is not a country” as one participant said); by correcting stereotypes, they believed that awareness and knowledge matter. The youth then felt empowered when they taught friends about themselves, who ‘they truly are’, or what ‘their country truly is’. This demonstrated that, on one hand, a strong sense of ethnoracial identity provided youth with pride and strength (which was also evident when they talked about the strength of ancestors), while on the other hand, they had to be careful and assess if the given situation was safe enough to bring their authentic self, or ‘lived subjectivity’. This dilemma begs the question of how racialized youth respond to the racist condition.

6.2 Navigating racism: diffusing the tension

Building on critical race theory and on resilience scholarship to date, in this work I addressed the theoretical limitations of dominant resilience theories in the context of experienced
racial discrimination. Resilience, broadly defined by individuals’ successful adaptation under challenging circumstances and their systems’ capacities to facilitate this adaptation (Masten, 2015; Ungar et al., 2008), has been studied by exploring patterns of coping when dealing with racist experiences. However, despite many studies in the field of coping, time and again the reasons and motivations behind their behavioural responses are not thoroughly examined in the existing literature, particularly the nuances of how systemic conditions shape individual coping. I attempted to address this gap by sharing the lessons learned about these interactional processes from the participants of this study.

The youth, having an astute awareness of their hyphenated identity and exposed to the adversities embedded in multicultural conditions, used well mastered calculative strategies, demonstrating a form of resilience to cope with their contradictory reality. This section is concerned with expressions of this resilience learned from youth, which meant them knowing when and in what context to respond or for that matter to stay silent.

Successful coping for this group of youth in a racist situation meant both the ability to contain the intensity of their emotions and develop a mindset that they must take responsibility to dissolve the tension. To achieve these outcomes, youth first engaged in a meaning-making process to make sense of racist experiences. They often had to suppress their feelings and then find ways to rise above them. Our youth participants show that they tried to either thoughtfully navigate a racist situation or disengage from it by turning towards their own spiritual resource. In this section, I discuss both: the functional adaptive strategies youth employ to deal with racist interpersonal encounters and their internal coping patterns. Particular attention in this research has been paid to the subjective meanings of these responses; therefore, I will provide insights into what was important for youth to accomplish in each situation.
6.2.1 The complexities of racist interactions: templates to respond

As was previously discussed, racialized youth constantly faced the demand to fit into prescribed identities when the normative conditions of multiculturalism create additional challenges for them to show up in a truly authentic way. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that these contextual underpinnings shape resilient coping in the presence of racism. To understand individuals’ resilient coping strategies, we must first understand the societal values and beliefs surrounding adversity and successful adaptation.

Participants learned early on that actively calling out racism might not be a safe response; therefore, they made contextually appropriate adaptations in their thinking and behaviour to avoid racism and minimize harm. They knew that in an environment where “white advantage has been the norm, any diminution of it is experienced existentially as a threat by some whites” (Hooker, 2009, p. 24). With awareness of that ‘norm’, youth tried to mitigate circumstances and avoid repercussions for showing resistance. They would try either de-escalate the situation by saying nothing to maintain the peace or carefully calculate the consequences if they did speak up. To gain some control over the situation, youth felt that by accommodating a white person’s expectations and needs and ‘taking care’ of the racist situation, they would potentially resolve the “misunderstanding”, as they often called it. Liu et al. (2019) spoke similarly about racialized people’s awareness and their need to be well-versed in the dominant cultural norms and rules when they try to accommodate the feelings of a white person for their own safety and peace of mind. In the context where ‘good people cannot be racist’ (DiAngelo, 2021), the findings of this study underline these youth’s perceptions that calling out racist behaviour may be seen as shaming or as an attack on a white person. Therefore, motivated by the fear of creating a
negative feedback loop and wanting to maintain safety, the participants strategically avoided
provocation at all costs.

One of the calculative strategies shared by youth was trying to be vigilant of not making
faulty assumptions, similar to what Alcoff (2019) notes in her writing, using Ofelia Schutte’s
idea of “invisibilization”; meaning that racialized individuals “performing” for cultural
expectations, “must be on guard at every moment against slippage” (p. 270). An example was a
participant noting how careful one should be: “people watch our actions”. Similar strategies to
deal with racism for most participants were shaped by the belief that ethnoracial persons
constantly have to second-guess if the situation was racist. Perhaps this vigilance is a
consequence of the dominant assumption that racism is becoming a less urgent issue in a
multicultural society. From the perspective of participating youth, it appears that racism is only
seen as a perceived experience that needs evidence before it becomes acknowledged as a real
event. The toll of second-guessing incidents of racism and doubting their own reality can have
tremendous consequences on an individuals’ well-being as their lived experiences are not seen as
valid and instead need to be screened through the eyes of whiteness.

The use of humour was another important finding related to resilient “atypical”, in Ungar’s
words, adjustments as it was used to actively control the experience. When society’s denial of
racism is so pervasive, youth in this study resorted to reducing racist comments to ‘jokes’ or
‘misunderstandings’ to make them less hurtful or simply to gain some control over the situation.
Youth often used humour to respond to racist situations as a strategy to minimize the impacts of
racism. For example, when Frank makes a Black American accent, or Celia calls herself a
‘whitey’. A similar pattern of using humour as a way of interaction in racialized settings was
observed by Douglass et al. (2016) in their study on ethnoracial teasing. They found that
ethnoracial joking was a common strategy for youth to communicate. Still, while it appeared normative and was often perceived as harmless, in many cases, ethnoracial teasing had negative psychological consequences for youth. My study supports these results as it seemed that while youth relied on humour to cope, they also acknowledged the tensions around it, especially when they felt the pressure to ‘take the joke’. Young’s (2011) claim about racial jokes illustrates this: “If politicizing agents call attention to such stereotypes and devaluations as evidence of deep and harmful oppression of the groups stereotyped and degraded, they are often met with the response that they should not take these images seriously, because their viewers do not; these are only harmless fantasies, and everyone knows they have no relationship to reality” (p. 136).

This difficulty in even approaching the subject, despite that youth felt sure about what they experienced, was a central theme in youth coping patterns. These seem to be rooted in the dominant impression that multicultural promises of inclusion and diversity are enough to solve racism. Youth seem trapped in this narrative to ‘celebrate diversity and inclusion’ with little choice but to navigate the environment and ensure that they are not making racist situations worse if they challenge the status quo. It appeared that hegemonic systems of whiteness shape people’s understandings of, and provide limits to, what counts as racism and, in turn, make confrontations in the face of racism particularly challenging, if not impossible. If addressing discrimination is avoided by society, as Kaiser & Mayor (2006) point out, then victims of racism will not be able to address it. The denial of racism, discussed in the previous section, is dangerous to racialized communities; it is like a form of structural ‘gaslighting’ when self-doubt is exacerbated and oppressed groups are led to question their perceived reality (Bailey, 2020).

A lack of addressing these systemic and institutional roots of racism constitutes an individualization of racism that suggests that racism is a result of individual biases and
prejudices - a common sentiment expressed by the youth in this study. Although racial prejudices and discrimination are connected and may contribute to maintaining racism, from youth experiences it seemed that power, as the foundation of racism, was missing (see Haeny et al., 2021). Youth held the belief that racism can be eliminated by changing people’s attitudes and beliefs during interpersonal encounters. Therefore, the youth took on that responsibility by skillfully navigating the environment and making small changes in interpersonal interactions, such as changing their own attitudes, mostly to avoid conflict.

At the beginning of this chapter, I addressed how youth tried to shift their socially constructed racial categories so they could adjust to the dominant values. They tried to improve their language skills, change their names, or choose a geographical location that is not commonly recognized as ‘Chinese’, for example. Stories show that youth used similar strategies as they proactively attempted to respond to unjust situations. With full awareness of the stereotypes applied to them, youth attempted to prove those stereotypes wrong in order to fight or avoid racism. Other studies revealed similar patterns as they identified this strategy of proving stereotypes wrong (e.g., Griffith et al., 2019). Yi et al. (2020) called this process a strategic anti-essentialism, which was common among racialized Asian American communities in their study as they “both embrace and challenge socially constructed racial categories in complex and strategic ways to advance social justice” (p. 547). The strategies of anti-essentialism were used to respond to racism by youth in this study as they did the ‘ordinary magic’ by utilizing behavioural patterns that worked for them in specific circumstances.

To illustrate, Black youth in this research, knowing the existing stereotype of them being angry, tried to challenge it. To avoid being seen as threatening, they acted in the opposite way, such as initiating contact by smiling to make a white person comfortable. This awareness of
others’ interpretations of them was so pervasive and alive in youth’s minds that it shaped their actions even in circumstances where they were treated unfairly. These young people appraised the risks associated with perpetuating a stereotype as more damaging than the incident itself. Therefore, resilient coping for them meant developing an awareness of stereotypes against their racial group and using that knowledge to fight racism by attempting to change the stereotypes themselves.

The youth were keenly aware that once the stereotypical image is created in people’s minds, then their racialized bodies start ‘telling the story’ based on people’s ideas. My findings highlight how important it is for youth to remain cognizant of these ‘stories’ so they can avoid a negative narrative by proving these stories wrong. So, to them, showing anger toward racist violence meant proving white people ‘right’ and reinforcing the stereotype. This balancing act of adaptations to dominant perceptions may lead to unresolved suffering and suppression of emotions; however, this coping strategy was also found in previous research as well.

The youth in this study knew that to be accepted in the dominant society, they must live according to its rules. Their adaptation to the environment was conditioned by the competencies that were valued in their society rather than based on prioritizing their own needs. Specifically, since Canadian multiculturalism values non-confrontational ways to approach racist encounters, the youth response of smiling in order to dissolve the tension is an appropriate contextual adaptation prioritizing their need to avoid conflict. The youth felt the responsibility to proactively engage in friendly communication, which demonstrates their flexibility and adaptability to the demands of their environments. According to resilience theory, this behaviour indicates adaptive problem-solving and mastery (Masten, 2015). By being nice to a racist person, youth believed they could shift the dominant narrative about their racial group, avoid
perpetuating stereotypes, and, therefore, prevent the perpetuation of racist encounters. In other words, youth were looking at themselves through the eyes of another to successfully follow the societal demands to be ‘celebrated’, perhaps, as ‘resilient’.

Understanding the dominant stereotype and embracing the idea that racism happened in the past and is long gone, youth convinced themselves that it is time to start fresh, forget historical racism and create trustworthy relationships. They felt as if they had to earn trust every time. Therefore, stories repeatedly called attention to participants’ enthusiasm and determination to diffuse the tension and dissolve barriers between them and a white person.

They felt a responsibility to resolve the racist incident in a way that would reassure the white body. They smiled to make a white person feel comfortable, they changed their name so it would be easier to pronounce, they minimized racism, hoping it would diminish, they adopted the neoliberal post-racist ideology and often embraced the narrative of the denial of racism. From the individualized perspective of resilience theory, all these examples show youth’s ability to adjust to the demands presented to them. Youth demonstrated the skills to contain the impacts of racism or, in some cases, to avoid it altogether. They also showed the capacity to assess when a situation required them to disengage.

For example, a few Black female participants discussed how they faced stereotypes of being a ‘superwoman’ and an angry woman if they did not smile. Therefore, as a response to these preconceptions, they felt that they must smile. While from a resilience perspective, we might categorize an individual’s ability to regulate anger as a positive quality, it may also have negative effects on women’s well-being. Examining the Black woman as a ‘superwoman’ stereotype, Harris-Perry (2011) notes that “anger is not experienced as a psychological reality but is seen through an ideology that distorts black women's lived experiences” (p. 95). This quality
of resistance is not valued in the society in which they live; therefore, their environments do not encourage it.

To navigate racist situations safely and with the awareness of these values and images of them, youth face the demand to make the situation comfortable and to minimize the potential threat to the white person. Youth learned ways to show up in contexts that are prevalent with these preconceived perceptions about them. For example, they knew that they must make an extra effort to rise above their image as violent or threatening, whether moving to a new neighbourhood, shopping, or when speaking their own language.

6.2.2 From suppressed anger to collective healing: addressing the hidden ideology

The findings discussed in the above section elucidate different forms of coping that youth engaged in to deal with racist encounters. The youth attempted to remain calm in racialized situations as a means to protect themselves from further adversities. It highlighted the fact that due to such demands, suppressing their emotional response was beneficial to their survival and well-being. Anger suppression as a coping strategy toward racism has been a consistent finding in previous research on coping with it (e.g., Brondolo et al., 2009).

Navigating racist spaces requires negotiating boundaries of belonging or identity. My findings underline that for youth to show up in an authentic way, or as ‘who they really are’ in a racially divided world, is not always welcomed and safe. There was a sense of grief in their stories as they negotiated their belonging while suppressing their true emotions.

Youth stories call attention to the perceived futility of speaking up to racism and how subsequently these encounters leave indelible marks: the feelings that are pushed aside but remain in their memory. All this unresolved suffering resulted in negative consequences of suppressing underlying emotions because even if youth were able to utilize internal coping
strategies in the moment, the pain remains deep inside. Cenat et al.’s (2022) study on experiences of Black communities in Canada showed that one in five of their participants reported psychosomatic symptoms related to everyday racism. Trauma neuroscientists also highlight that the experience is most likely to become trauma when individuals do not have any available support in the presence of a highly stressful event (Badenoch, 2018).

With so many factors working against youth, and often with few or no accessible support systems, the youth perceived the need to turn to whatever they could to find that extra strength to continue living in this racially divided society. At times, this emotional detachment made it necessary for youth to find other outlets to relax and connect with themselves and the world. The participants found relief within mindfulness, collective healing, journaling and religion. The broader literature on coping with racism also highlights the importance of spiritual practices and artistic expressions (Houshmand et al., 2019; Jacob et al., 2022; Teti et al., 2012).

A widespread declaration among Black participants was the role that religion played as it provided youth with a sense of community, hope and comfort. Religious rituals and practices, such as praying and singing when they felt helpless, offered youth solace, support, and a sense of connection. This finding is consistent with the literature on religion and coping, which notes its benefits in situations that are impossible to repair, therefore giving power to a higher source offers some predictability and relief (Park, 2005). Additionally, the research says that religion is a coping strategy that supports meaning-making and positive reappraisal of stressful events and allows participants to overcome daily struggles (Teti et al., 2012). Similarly, for youth in this study, religion at times was the only practice that helped them to make sense when circumstances were beyond their control as it allowed them to hold hope that fairness would prevail.
In addition to transcendence, collective healing was noted as an important aspect that contributes to youth remediation from the negative impacts of discrimination. Healing through communal bonds helped them overcome challenges and eventually find peace within, as well as strengthening their bond to community. Youth processed collective pain and strength by acknowledging the resistance and suffering of their ancestors. This ultimately mitigated their feelings of alienation.

The young people in the study also noted that they found discussions with other minority youth restorative, as the methodology of our study provided space for them to share experiences of oppression and relate through feelings. This finding proposes that facilitating opportunities for youth to share their experiences with other oppressed groups can be meaningful for their well-being; it may empower marginalized groups to unite against white supremacy and perhaps heal the tensions among themselves. A protective function of shared experiences of oppression was also found in other research on ethnoracial identity (see Rivas Drake et al, 2022). Kiang et al. (2021) also notes the role of critical consciousness of an oppressed minority identity as being beneficial in motivation and feelings of empowerment to address marginalization. Similarly, Rivas-Drake (2022) suggests that awareness of systemic inequalities of other racialized minorities lead to “cross-racial coalition building as a response to the shared experiences of racial discrimination groups of colour face” (p. 319).

This collective experience refers to what Dei (2013) highlighted as an important component for decolonizing knowledge of marginalized communities. He emphasized the value of creating conditions where the embodied knowledge of the oppressed is prioritized so that their voices and experiences of them feel heard (Dei, 2013). This also related to Soltani’s (2017) comment that “The production of embodied knowledge is intrinsically linked to feeling the
knowledge that accompanies the mindfulness of the oppressed” (p. 18). As Fanon (2004) noted in *The wretched of the earth*, colonial systems make one believe that oppression is a natural order of things by separating oppressed groups from each other. He believed that for oppressed communities, coming together is a critical step toward liberation from colonialism and other forms of oppression. Fanon argued that uniting and mobilizing oppressed groups could create a powerful force to challenge their oppressors and demand their rights.

Learning from youth stories, collective resilience emerged as an important concept to enhance the well-being of racially oppressed communities. A collective understanding of resilience sheds light on the ability of communities and groups to empower themselves and each other in order to resist systemic discrimination and injustice. As was discussed above, this idea becomes unattainable in the context based on segregation where identity expressions are conditional.

### 6.3 Resilience: new conceptualization of adversity and resilient adjustments in the context of racism

The concept of resilience has undergone many criticisms when used to describe the well-being of marginalized groups for its emphasis on personal choice and grit, risking normalizing social oppression (discussed in the literature review, Schwarz, 2018). In psychology scholarship, resilience is seen as a valuable construct to counteract deficit models when understanding the lived experiences of marginalized youth (e.g., Marks et al., 2020; Masten & Barnes, 2018). Some social work literature critiques the use of the resilience construct in the context of oppression and urges the elimination of the concept, while others argue that it needs substantial revisions for it to meaningfully advance the practice of social work (e.g., Collins, 2017; Park et al., 2020; Ungar, 2018). Zembylas (2020) critically examines the consequences of the
psychologization of resilience in higher education and offers alternative views to understand resilience within power imbalances and discrimination. He highlights the ideological tendencies of neoliberalism to place responsibility on an individual, which further disadvantages already marginalized student groups. Instead, he stresses the importance of fostering a more socially aware understanding of the concept. Despite these tensions, the term resilience remains widely used in the academic domain and in community settings to describe the processes of thriving.

There is an increasing use of resilience in community activism organizations as a way to challenge deficit-based stereotypes, to foster community connections through allyship and activism, and to empower individuals to assert their identity in advocating for social change (i.e., Resilience BC: Anti-Racism Network, 2023; https://www.resiliencebc.ca/).

What emerged in lived experiences of ethnoracial minority youth in this study suggests that the notion of resilience can offer valuable insights to understand the well-being of racialized youth in Canadian society. Furthermore, the findings inform critical engagements with the concept, inviting us to rethink what adversity, protective factors and adaptation mean to a group of racialized young people. Existing studies about resilience in the context of racial discrimination are inadequate in recognizing the complexities of youth’s experiences of adaptation to their social surroundings while they navigate racist spaces. From the socio-ecological perspective of resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2018), what is happening in constantly changing macrosystems is essential for an individual who is navigating risks and adaptation. However, there has been little attention to this socio-historical level of analysis in the literature concerned with how racialized youth cope with discrimination.

My study engages in this conversation and builds upon these ideas by adding new themes to the existing body of knowledge about what enhances or hinders resilience for ethnoracial
youth in the context of Vancouver. In this section, I propose new ways of discussing resilience in the context of racism that center on the interaction between individuals and their environments and identify sociopolitical inequalities that shape and condition individuals’ adaptations. The findings also illustrate the significance of contextual systems, such as ideologies surrounding multiculturalism, for resilience of ethnoracial youth. Considering these significant findings, I propose what Bottrell (2009) calls a “social analysis of individual experience”, which suggests viewing resilience for minority youth as a collective experience rather than placing emphasis only on individual coping.

To operationalize resilience, it is necessary to identify the risks and challenges individuals face, then to evaluate how they respond to those risks and challenges, and finally, to identify the factors or processes that contribute to adaptive success (Masten & Barnes, 2018). I will discuss how my findings advance these three fundamental features.

6.3.1 Racism as adversity: hidden risks and vulnerabilities

The analysis of racism-related stressors is necessary for understanding resilience (Masten, 2019; Ungar, 2021). Therefore, one must define how unique challenges manifest in specific contexts. One of my contributions to the existing debate was to provide a deeper analysis of the adversities that racialized youth face in Western Canada, given that representation of situational nuances of racial adversity and resilience in the Canadian context is an identified gap in the existing literature (Cenat et. al., 2022). Except for relatively few studies (Arthur et al., 2008; Cénat, Darius, et al., 2022; Cénat, Hajizadeh, et al., 2022; Houshmand et al., 2014, 2019; Kubota, 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020), effectively, the current knowledge in this field is mainly based on the studies within the context of the United States (e.g., Wilcox et al., 2021). Youth in my research, however, highlighted that they experienced significant differences
between Canadian and US manifestations of racism – this finding emphasizes the need to pay attention and explore context-specific challenges. As such, my analysis of the multicultural environment reveals that the significant risk factor for these youth was not a particular racist encounter but the experienced denial of the event. This finding is significant to resilience theory as it troubles the operationalization of racism-related risk factors and raises awareness that societal conditions may obscure the full spectrum of vulnerabilities. Masten & Barnes (2018) noted that the extent of adversity plays an essential role in how individuals adjust to their environments despite negative life events, which highlights the need to contextualize risk factors.

This group of youth experienced discrimination in various settings through stereotyping, institutional and subtle forms of racism, in which their experiences were ignored and dismissed. The stories in this study confirm that the problems related to the ideology of Canadian multiculturalism create significant challenges for racialized youth. These stories showed that without a critical analysis of systemic oppressions, it is hard to appreciate what racialized youth must contend with on the interpersonal level. Ungar (2021) warns us that “risk … is seldom contained to one or two narrowly defined proximal systems but instead occurs in mixtures of risk factors at different systemic levels” (p. 12). Even if previous research identifies the risks and challenges, it fails to provide detailed attention to the specific manifestation of their adversities (Wilcox et al., 2021). A valuable study with Black Canadian was conducted by Cenat and colleagues (2022) that demonstrated how participants faced various forms of discrimination, including daily racism, major racial discrimination, and racial microaggressions. This important study aims to uncover the layers of negative impact of racial discrimination on people’s lives by highlighting the detrimental impact on their self-esteem and life satisfaction. These findings align with previous research that showed the negative effects of racism on the well-being of
Black communities. While Cenat et al. (2022) results are consistent with my findings, I additionally provided qualitative accounts of the mechanisms associated with racism and the consequences of these encounters on participants’ everyday well-being. Ungar (2021) refers to these nuances as “the quality of stressors that a system experiences”, factors that the Cenat et al. (2022) did not fully capture in their quantitative study. Additionally, my research findings reveal the daily impacts of racism not only for Black Canadians, but also for youth from other ethnoracial groups.

To illustrate, in addition to different forms of experienced racial discrimination, our research suggests that youth faced difficulty identifying discrimination and the tensions around naming specific experiences as racist. Therefore, assessing the intensity of adversity - an integral question of resilience analysis – becomes incredibly challenging in a society that tends to deny the existence of racism. This contextual condition obscured the ability to evaluate risk and impacted youth responses, further shaping and limiting the analysis of resilient manifestations. In such an environment that does not provide a safe space for an adversity to be named and acknowledged, and to call an encounter racist, one must be careful of not only how to respond, but also confront self-doubt of whether or not the incident could be perceived as an ‘adverse event’, in resilience terms. The consequences of making racism invisible are two-fold: it dismisses youth experiences as less important and, in turn, shapes their own interpretations of racist events according to societal expectations. This vicious cycle perpetuates and reinforces the (in)visibility of racism overall, erases youth experiences, and prescribes the rules of how one must react to it. Therefore, one must bear in mind that individual coping strategies viewed in isolation provide only a limited understanding of resilience as they are constantly negotiated according to, and in interaction with, the contextual processes and new adversities.
In contrast, my research shows that individual behaviour, when understood within such situational factors, allows us to see more clearly what conditions may create youth’s hesitation to see themselves as the targets of racism. As Kaiser & Major (2006) point out, “individual, situational, and cultural factors influence the extent to which individuals will regard themselves as victims of discrimination” (p. 4). With that awareness, it is important to keep in mind that societal conditions may obscure the full spectrum of vulnerabilities in the context of racism.

As it pertains to resilience, my findings respond to the demand that is overlooked by existing studies on resilience in the presence of racism, which is the ideological foundation of white dominance and power relationships and its role in conceptualizing racism related risks (e.g., Zembylas, 2020). Since this multiculturalism ideology tends to deny that racism exists, it has an effect of ‘normalizing’ ongoing racism (Walcott, 2019). When trying to understand resilience, and in particular, racism-related risks, we must not overlook the ongoing minimization of adversities that racialized communities face every day. Clay (2019) explains this process of “normalization” through his critical analysis of Black Resilience Neoliberalism by saying that the consequence is “both the normalization and the valorization of exercising human capital in relation to ‘overcoming’ or enduring structural racism, both of which obscure or ignore Black suffering” (p. 103). In this study, youth perceptions of racism-related risks were often shaped by the ideology that conveniently looks at racism as the problem of the past and racist events only as individual flaws or ‘misunderstandings’. This presents the importance of what Bottrell (2009) warns us of as she highlights that resilience must be understood with attention to “societal expectations, differentiated interests and the political and governance strategies that surround and infuse local conditions and are integral to the construction of adversities faced by disadvantaged young people” (p. 323).
Adversity in this study was related to bystanders’ silence, facing segregation and othering, and the everydayness of racism. Previous research on resilience for minority youth emphasized the importance of “caring and skilled adults and/or peer relationships” in supporting them through hardships (Marks et al., 2020). The findings of this study show how the multicultural climate at school was deficient in providing these protective resources for youth. Moreover, it demonstrated how institutions perpetuate further adversities, often presenting themselves in hidden ways. Youth stories highlighted that safety at school may be experienced differently by students of colour and white students. On this note, a recent report on racial bullying in Canadian schools highlighted alarming numbers, with almost half of the students who witnessed or experienced racism at school remaining silent or pretending it did not happen (Korzinski, 2021). In this climate of nominal racial neutrality, only students who are white have the privilege of experiencing ‘objectivity’ from the teachers’ assistance in resolving the conflict as they are not impacted by discrimination based on race. This lack of support demonstrates that the responsibility to overcome racism is left entirely to the racialized person. Although bystanders’ silence is not addressed in the handful of Canadian studies of racism and resilience, Cenat and colleagues (2022), in their study with Black individuals in Canada, showed how chronic everyday racial discrimination was related to internalized experiences showing up through psychosomatic adaptations in the presence of racism.

6.3.2 Theorizing resilient adaptations and the discourse of denial of racism

An important implication for resilience theory is that from youth stories, their identified risks and adversities are often not directly related to a racist event itself, but emerge from what occurs in the context of racism, which is the response of their environment to what happens to them. Their resilient adaptations, such as self-reliance and capacity to take control of their lives,
emerged in this constant decision-making process around the emotional labour that is required of them to respond to racism in a meaningful way, again, when they are left alone to manage it. Self-efficacy as well as an individual’s capacity to take care of themselves was found to be important for resilience in previous studies (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2008; Masten & Barnes, 2018). However, for this group of youth, these characteristics led to behaviours that on one hand seem to be self-serving in specific situations, but on the other, they were not sufficient to achieve their optimal goals. To fully understand resilient adaptations from the socio-ecological model of resilience, what is important as Ungar (2011) claims is that we must understand the functionality of behaviour (p. 8). The findings of this study illuminate that these context-dependent so-called atypical adaptations were common among youth.

The discourse of denial is a significant finding for resilience theory because it shows how difficult it can be to recognize the direct impacts of racism while helping us to understand the nature of resilient responses. It governs the extent to which individuals report their racist experiences, which is a response to contextual demands that may not be readily visible without a critical view of the context. In other words, on an individual level, the youth in this study demonstrated their resilient qualities by showing their capacity to evaluate the efficacy of their actions in specific circumstances. This coping strategy may not appear as the ideal option for individuals, but it shows ‘contextually reasonable adaptability’ if one views resilience from a multisystemic perspective (Ungar et al., 2023). As Kaiser and Major (2006) noted, one of the reasons for not identifying as victims of discrimination is to avoid its psychological toll. Due to the context and ideological demands, it seems that this strategy of failing to report discrimination served as a coping mechanism that allowed youth to effectively lighten their psychological burden. This pattern is functional and meaningful within the specific social and ecological
circumstances in which these youth found themselves, which often was perceived as erasure of
their experience. As Henry and Tator (2005) point out, “The discourse of denial of racism
becomes so routine at the individual, collective, and institutional levels of society that making
the charge of racism and raising the possibility of its influence on social outcomes becomes a
serious contravention of mainstream values and norms” (p. 59).

In viewing individual experiences from a socio-ecological perspective, we have a better
appreciation of individual capacities to navigate ‘health-sustaining resources’, considering the
extent to which their communities can provide these resources (Ungar, 2011). This interplay
between individual and contextual is at the core of this work. I have learned from youth stories
that they had a good understanding of how to ‘be resilient’ or, in other words, how to adopt the
attitude and characteristics that are valued in the social environment where they live, and to be
disciplined in their actions, even if all of this did not align with their own values or even if it
meant dismissing the harm that they experience. The conceptualization of resilience in this study
signifies the tension between striving to honour youth strength and creativity in choosing the best
possible strategy to deal with racism in the moment, and being careful to label these strategies as
resilient, because it may hide the impact of oppressive systems as they remain unchallenged.

From a resilience perspective, the question remains: can these behavioural choices be
viewed as resilient responses? On the one hand, they suggest the youth’s ability to make
contextually appropriate adjustments to survive. On the other, it is questionable whether this
response serves the needs of an oppressed person, or does it, in fact, ignore their suffering in
exchange for a white person’s comfort? A similar question Zembylas (2020) poses in his critical
analysis of the construct is “what does [resilience do] for disadvantaged groups and communities
to access levels of social change” (p. 8).
One such example in the research is Arthur et al.’s (2008) study in which the authors conclude that “downplaying the importance of these [racist] events” allowed youth to find belonging; in their research, this strategy of minimizing the impact of racism was interpreted as a resilient response and a protective tool that can “reduce risks, promote self-esteem and enhance positive relationships with both their ethnic communities as well as mainstream society” (p. 73). Based on the stories of youth in this study, however, I suggest that Arthur et al.’s (2008) interpretation may be a risky conclusion and should be approached with caution. As Bottrell (2009) warns, these interpretations of individual adaptations disregarding larger systems at play may “shift the emphasis from positive adaptation despite adversity to positive adaptation to adversity” (p. 334). If societal discourse is based on the belief that racism is a thing of the past, then it is assumed that racialized individuals should be able to cope and access available resources. Youth in this study seem to be facing and embracing this narrative.

If resilience focuses mainly on centring individual coping, the adaptations and problem-solving behavioural strategies discussed in the previous section may be perceived as examples of the “ordinary magic” that helps individuals thrive (Masten, 2001). Conversely, looking at these adjustments through an anti-racism lens, it shows how these strategies may be harmful to ethnoracial communities as they seem to be serving systems of dominance to maintain the status quo and requires marginalized groups to adapt to unjust conditions. It shows how the risks associated with individualization of resilience ignore societal responsibility and make people believe that individuals are capable of “achieving” resilience on their own (Clay, 2019; Zembylas, 2020). This emphasis on personal responsibility may pathologize racialized individuals for their inability to take charge of their lives regardless of discrimination.
Individualization of resilience and individualization of racism, both have negative consequences for marginalized communities that have been identified in previous studies as well (e.g., Brody et al., 2016; Clay, 2019; Liu et al., 2019). One of the shortcomings of seeing racism as an individual act alone may be a distraction from noticing how discrimination operates and is “systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions” (Young, 1990, p. 41).

Similar aspects of functionality of behaviour were observed in youth’s navigating their identities. When we adopt a “critical engagement with resilience” (Zembylas, 2020), we can notice in the accounts of these young people the importance of recognizing that resistance and negotiation are contextual and can look like both: separating oneself from the characteristics of one’s ethnoracial group and showing up fully with your ‘true’ subjective self. It means that to understand resilience we need to accept the fluidity of motivations and conditions that require youth to navigate their identity positions according to available contextual supports. Youth in this research did not want to be seen as victims, so they self-identified within the racist world as ‘doing well’. Sometimes they would roll with the punches so they could express their ‘resilient’ selves, even if it meant erasing some parts of their identity, because they knew this was the best way to be included, recognized and ‘celebrated’. It emerged that youth were often battling some sort of boundary violation as they had to stretch their limits of how much of themselves is acceptable to reveal. Being aware of how they are seen in public domains, among their peers at school or among other racially oppressed groups, youth learned that often their ‘obedient self’ is recognized as ‘resilient’. They also learned the benefits of being an exception to the existing stereotype, particularly if it was a negative one. This functionality of behaviour may be explained by Clay’s (2019) arguments related to Black Neoliberal Resilience theory. He challenges the idea
of exceptionalism or being an exception used within the discourse of Black individuals' resilience in the face of structural racism. Youth living in communities that valorize individual effort and emphasize exceptional achievements of racialized communities internalize the notion that success is attainable for all individuals regardless of their circumstances. They start to overlook how the more prominent socio-political factors contribute to additional barriers that they face due to inequality and marginalization. Like youth in this study Clay (2019) in his research with Black youth in the US noted how efforts to show up as “resilient” by proving stereotypes wrong “shifts the focus from the violence of the continued denial of Black humanity and asserts the primacy of Black folks having to prove otherwise. […] [it] positions racism as something to take for granted and to endure” (p. 98).

Emerging stories in my research indicate that the processes of resilience in the Canadian context of colour evasiveness are shaped by the neoliberal ideology that does not acknowledge the existence of racism and values personal achievements and grit. These values and beliefs inform expressions of resilience as it implies that everyone, regardless of their racial position, has equal opportunities and abilities to successfully navigate this environment if they try hard enough. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this climate, which disregards racial power dynamics, the youth felt a responsibility to resolve a racist conflict as if it is a problem for ethnoracial minority groups to deal with. Furthermore, in the context of colour evasiveness, the structures of whiteness are not addressed overall, thereby creating situations where racialized individuals must be aware of white people’s perceptions and their feelings that are often implied and hidden while perpetuating the narrative of white racial innocence, as discussed in the previous sections. My findings show how this narrative, informed by white people’s emotional
reactivity, further animates youth responses to racist encounters, which was discussed in the
previous section.

Calling these youth ‘resilient’ without being specific about what exactly they are resilient
about and for whom may mask important elements of oppressive environments and as Zembylas
(2020), among others, warns us, these uncritical labels may “normalize the ongoing oppression
of socially disadvantaged groups” (p. 4). This decontextualization can pose several new
disadvantages to ethnoracial youth. Similar to the concern that Gergen (2003) expressed when he
compared this imposing of dominant values on marginalized groups to the historical practices of
colonialism, which can perpetuate further injustices.

My findings highlight similar calculative strategies that appeared through inconsistencies
about strong ethnic identity as a protective factor against the adverse impacts of racism.
Resilience studies in this area show mixed results that strong ethnoracial identity is a protective
factor in the context of racism (Coll et al., 1996; Neblett et al., 2012; Rivas-Drake et al., 2022;
Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015). For example, Neblette et al. (2012) found that ethnoracial identity
strengthens youth’s capacity to cope with racial stereotypes and discrimination. Huynh & Fuligni
(2010), on the other hand, report that ethnoracial identity was not a protective factor for Asian
American youth. Based on the accounts of youth in this study, a strong sense of ethnoracial
identity may provide a sense of belonging and community. However, the stories also reveal the
importance of contextualizing this understanding. Certain expressions of ethnoracial identity do
not seem to be reliably welcomed in spaces where whiteness and proximity to whiteness is the
standard. It appeared that youth diverged from their ethnoracial group characteristics in
proximity to dominant norms if they sensed that the expectation is for them to prove the
stereotype wrong; they would prioritize this ‘demand’ by resisting stereotypes even if it meant
compromising their identity. These findings advance resilience theory as it demonstrates that protective factors, such as ethnoracial identity, can only be understood as fluid and contextual, and in constant process of negotiation and transformation. As Ungar (2011) writes, “A robust theory of resilience should account for changing environments and the facilitative function that each provides” (p. 12).

With these notions in mind, it appears predictable that youth did not actively engage in challenging racism. My findings show that these youth did not have access to sufficient supportive resources that could respond to their needs and provide tools to safely address racism. Protective factors at the community level identified in the resilience literature, such as access to resources and social support, for the most part, did not exist for these young people. Or if they existed, they were not accessible in any meaningful way for them. Therefore, youth relied on their coping skills while they tried to guess others’ actions to protect themselves. It seems that these youth could not just ‘show up’ in spaces without being vigilant about how their presence is perceived in a racialized context. They had to calculate the risks so they could navigate the spaces safely. This finding is significant in understanding the contextual underpinnings of youth motivations for not actively challenging racism. Viewed from a contextual perspective, this calculated response is conditioned by the silence of others, which makes it a strategic decision-making mechanism that is functional, even if it is self-defeating. To put it another way, it is a kind of ‘forced’ response. Walcott (2019) captures the essence of how the dominant narrative of a ‘racism free’ society shapes the experiences, thoughts and feelings of people of colour: “We are told that to seek social justice is to demonize white people; we are told that we must embrace our individualism and take responsibility for our exclusion if it can even be called that; we are told that the very identities that white supremacy’s logics have given to us should now be put
behind us — in short, we are asked to perpetuate more lies in the service of sparing whiteness a serious and sustained look at itself” (Walcott, 2019, p. 400).

Using a critical race theory as an overreaching theoretical approach to understanding resilience requires paying attention to the ideology of whiteness that often remains hidden and is ignored by resilience theory when it is decontextualized. Youth stories show that narratives perpetuated by whiteness are strong and erect barriers that hinder youth from accessing the necessary resources. Without a critical, contextualized view of the experience, we may perpetuate beliefs that pathologize youth for not seeking out supports or asserting themselves in challenging an unfair situation. Analyzing resilience without taking into consideration the hegemonic systems of power, we may perceive these youth as passive in their efforts to challenge discrimination. The stories of this study highlight the importance of recognizing how white ideology operates as it invites us to pay attention to and notice what might be the consequences for youth when they try to challenge the status quo. This analysis provides the awareness that youth must adjust to new demands that they are facing, which leads them to be strategic about their actions.

The findings of this study provide evidence that resilience of ethnoracial minority youth cannot be understood without understanding white dominance when considering societal conditions that support or hinder youth well-being. Through a critical multicultural lens, it seems that youth are trapped by the myth of multiculturalism and its related concepts of the denial of racism, bystanders’ silence and segregation. All these conditions shaped vulnerabilities as well as youth responses to racist encounters. Overall, they believed that if they try hard enough, they will be able to succeed, be recognized or accepted, and hope to make a positive change in eliminating racism.
6.4 Implications for practice and research

The stories of this group of ethnoracial minority young people have several implications for us to reconsider the idea of resilience and racism and the practice of and research on supporting racialized youth who experience racism. As Masten (2021) suggests,

[Early investigators [of resilience] were searching for answers to a fundamental question: What makes a difference? In other words, how do we account for the positive life course of some children in the context of exposure to risks or severe adversity? The ultimate goal of answering this question was translational, to inform practice and policy that would prevent problems from arising or support positive development despite the presence of hazardous circumstances (p. 113).

Resilience theory has a vital role to play in practical applications. Considering this, I wish to explore the implications that my research findings have for interdisciplinary interventions aimed at improving the well-being of ethnoracial youth. Specifically, my study shed light on the discrepancies between the lived experiences of resilience among racialized minority youth in Vancouver and the constructed knowledge about resilience in the public discourse. My findings indicate that the two most significant factors affecting youth were the perceived lack of social support and the silence in the face of racism. However, the dominant messages and societal beliefs imply that support exists and is embedded in multicultural practices and ideologies. With these observations in mind, I offer insights for practice that could be useful to professionals such as social workers, educators, clinicians, healthcare professionals, and community and government organizations that support racialized populations. Based on youth identifications of resilience-enhancing resources, my research findings suggest that empowering communities of practitioners to apply anti-racism principles to macro and micro-level interventions is crucial in
recognizing and challenging racism actively. Rather than solely focusing on 'making' young people more resilient to racism, it is imperative to prioritize dismantling hegemony and targeting whiteness through policy-level interventions and institutional practices at both interpersonal and societal levels. This recommendation is based on my research findings and supported by the available interdisciplinary literature discussed throughout this dissertation.

6.4.1 Recommendations for practice: challenging dominant narratives and empowering communities

Addressing the silence about racism. Youth stories showed how bystanders’ silence in racist situations affected them. These situations often require emotional labour as the youth try to assess the situation and their role in it. This highlights the idea that resilience is a relational construct that requires ‘destabilizing the hegemony of individual choice’ (Clay, 2019; Zembylas, 2020). To put this into practice, interventions should focus on changing the culture of white dominant groups. It is essential to recognize the power dynamics at play in social structures, as this affects decision-making and who benefits from it. Previous research in education has recommended the formation of communities of social justice educators (Kelly & Brandes, 2010), which can be applied to other disciplines as well.

As practitioners who strive to be anti-oppressive, it is important to reflect on how our social locations impact our work, whether that be in teaching, healthcare, psychology or social work. By engaging in anti-racist practices in schools and other institutions, we can not only alleviate the emotional burden placed on racialized individuals but also empower students and educators to recognize and challenge racism. Furthermore, this approach can help to problematize the role of whiteness and work towards dismantling its supremacy over marginalized communities. As Yee and Dumbrill (2016) caution, everyone “participates in the
creation of systems that do, in fact, exclude the ethnoracial Other” (p. 30). Thus, for social work practitioners who hold positions of power in decision-making processes, it is crucial to critically examine how they may be “complicitly or explicitly involved in the process of Whiteness” (p. 30) and may remain silent in the face of racism. Therefore, decentering whiteness as a neutral social dimension is crucial for anti-racist social work practice. Instead of simply focusing on cultural competence and ‘knowing’ the other, we must interrogate what it means to be white as practitioners (Nylund, 2006).

*Listening to the lived experiences of racism.* Recognizing various manifestations of racism is crucial. Racial discrimination can take subtle forms that are pervasive and difficult to challenge. To combat this issue, it is important to recognize microaggressions and the everydayness of racism. We must also have courageous conversations about racism, provide safe spaces for sharing racialized experiences, and avoid structural gaslighting. Honouring lived experiences and believing individuals when they report racism is essential to providing safer sharing environments. Unfortunately, participants in this research noted that it was difficult for them to share their experiences of discrimination and ask for help because their perceptions were minimized or ignored. As a result, young people often use an internal algorithm to gauge the significance of a racist comment and whether it warrants being called out. Making racism visible and prioritizing subjective experiences is one way to combat this issue.

As Kubota (2015), among others, states, making racism explicit and hearing the voices of racialized people is paramount. This will benefit not only service users but also the leadership and professionals who serve the communities. Ann Lopez’s (2020) study highlights the prevalence of discrimination against Black educators in Canadian schools due to anti-Black racism. She also emphasizes the danger of silence and describes “the harm done when anti-Black
racism is not challenged” (p. 1936). Based on the lived experiences of Black leaders in the Toronto Area, Lopez suggests policies to support them. Similarly, Badwall (2014) analyzes how front-line racialized social workers navigate a profession constructed within the framework of whiteness. The study draws on the narratives of social workers in Toronto. It critically examines the challenges racialized social workers face (perceived as the Other) when working as helpers.

Recognize subjective experiences of ‘doing well’. Critical conversations about various ways of coping are necessary for interventions based on social justice. The dominant practices in helping professions may perpetuate deficit-based narratives of ethnoracial minority communities seeing them as victims. Therefore, the resilience perspective is helpful for person-centred care, as it allows for unpacking individual resources and highlights strengths that may not be readily available at first glance. Understanding societal values and beliefs about resilient coping strategies is essential, which can help initiate reflexivity on biases and hegemonic knowledge on accessing ‘successful coping’. These dominant assumptions may limit our understanding of individuals’ subjective sense of well-being. In this study, when interpreting the stories of youth, it was sometimes challenging to distinguish whether the coping strategy was targeted to address a racial encounter or was a form of fulfilling societal expectations of how they should act.

It is important to note that people often act in specific ways because they have limited options available to them. Social workers and other practitioners need to understand these coping patterns to better assess the needs and resources of individuals. For instance, from a trauma-informed perspective, previous experiences of discrimination in healthcare may affect patients' trust and willingness to participate in recommended treatments. Patients may also feel pressure to 'demonstrate resilience' despite adverse experiences. To address this, social workers can directly ask clients about their past experiences with racism during assessments. This dialogue may
create a safe space for individuals to process race-based trauma and establish practices for support and advocacy. The intervention is then tailored to meet the individual's subjective experiences and needs.

Social workers who are part of interdisciplinary teams, such as those in healthcare, need to initiate conversations that are informed by trauma about how people experience safety differently based on their social location. Due to the prevalent emphasis on resilience, healthcare professionals may inaccurately evaluate individuals' coping mechanisms or label them as ‘lacking’ resilience. To address these concerns, social workers, as members of multidisciplinary teams, should engage in critical conversations with clients and health professionals about various meaningful ways of ‘doing well’ that could provide valuable information about clients’ care without normative judgments. My research findings, along with the broader literature, highlight the necessity of challenging the hegemonic knowledge of resilience and recognizing its oppressive impact on communities. This requires critical conversations about ‘normative’ ways of coping and alternatives.

Critical awareness of terminology. It is essential for practitioners in education, social work, and counselling to question taken-for-granted assumptions about resilience in the context of racism. Previous research noted that “teaching for social justice should infuse the entire teacher education program” (Kelly & Brandes, 2010, p. 399). I want to extend this valuable recommendation and add that the critical review of the terms teachers or other practitioners use daily, such as success, resilience, strength, normative, and value concepts, are very important to interrogate through a social justice anti-oppressive lens. This critical interrogation of widely used concepts will ensure the inclusion of lived experiences and voices that are historically marginalized and excluded.
The discussion in this dissertation demonstrated that viewing racism as an individual act is dangerous as it may close the door for discrimination to be challenged. What is required from institutions is anti-racist education and open discussions around the definitions of racism, not as attributes of ‘bad’ people, but as oppression deeply embedded in our systems of white supremacy and the understanding that we all participate in it, often without being aware of it. A similar point was discussed by Kubota (2015), urging schools to challenge this “narrow understanding” of racism and focus on its institutional perpetuation. Kubota identifies the need for schools to strive for “a greater nuanced understanding of the ‘racist place’ with critical reflectivity” (p. 10).

My findings support previous reports that celebrating diversity and inclusion is ineffective in making racialized youth feel seen. In fact, this may marginalize them even further. Instead, it is critical to support communities of empowerment and resistance. Schools and organizations can alleviate the emotional labour of racialized people who are asked to ‘educate’ others about their culture by placing more resources on fostering resilient anti-racist communities instead of directing interventions to increase resilience in marginalized individuals.

6.4.2 Recommendations for future research.

Interdisciplinary research methodologies. According to Masten (2021), “We are now in the midst of the fourth wave as scholars tackle multisystem questions and attempt to integrate concepts and findings about resilience across disciplines and levels of analysis” (p. 114). My research is a response to this demand is it shows that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to understand resilience to capture the cultural meanings of the construct. From this perspective, studying resilience in the context of racism means involving community partners from different areas of practice, including teachers, clinicians, psychologists, and healthcare workers, for collaborative critical research and practice initiatives. To appreciate the complexity of resilience
that can inform meaningful interventions, it is vital to prioritize inquiries rooted in lived experiences.

My findings demonstrate that an interdisciplinary view of resilience in the context of racism requires critical engagement with the construct. Otherwise, applying resilience, a psychological construct, to explain lived experiences from other perspectives can perpetuate harm. For example, the latest Statistics Canada report (2020) on Black Canadians’ work experience indicates that Black Canadians' showed resilience more often than the rest of the Canadian population. It is evident that in this report, the psychological definition of resilience was used without consideration of the context and how these findings may impact racialized communities. Should the anti-racism lens be applied to interpret these findings, a more nuanced and comprehensive picture would be revealed.

*Define resilience in the context of lived experiences.* Revisiting the use of the term *resilience* at the political and individual levels is essential. Collins (2019) asserts that “for critical social theory, accountability matters – there is no knowledge for knowledge’s sake whereby a scholar can produce knowledge and remain unconcerned about how it is used” (p. 64). Therefore, to ensure a just analysis of the experiences of marginalized communities it is critical to question societal beliefs and values about adversity and successful adaptation as conditions that often shape how individuals cope. For example, when examining individual patterns to cope with racism, it is essential to critically review the implications of choosing certain behaviours.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

The study explored resilience of minority youth and their adaptive strategies in dealing with racism. It critically engaged with the traditional idea of resilience, stating that the risks and adversities these youth faced arose not only from racist events but also from how their environment responded to racism. In navigating these complex situations, ethnoracial minority youth often demonstrated self-reliance and control over their lives, traits associated with resilience. However, these qualities may not be enough to achieve their optimal goals. The study highlighted the discourse of denial as a significant finding, which governs the extent to which individuals report their experiences of racism. It illuminated the challenges of recognizing the indirect impacts of racism, as they may not be readily visible without a critical perspective.

Youth demonstrated resilience by evaluating the efficacy of their actions in specific circumstances, even if these actions may not align with their values or involve dismissing the harm they experience. This study emphasized the importance of considering the functionality of behaviour and the multifaceted nature of resilience, particularly in the context of racism. While some adaptations may appear contextually reasonable, they may also serve to perpetuate oppressive systems. Resilience solely focusing on individual coping may mask the essential elements of oppressive environments and place undue responsibility on marginalized individuals. The study underscored the importance of contextualizing protective factors, such as the role of ethnocultural identity.

Participants’ calculated responses to racism, based on mutual knowledge within a ‘racism-free’ society, emphasized the strategic decision-making mechanisms at play. The silence of others conditions youth responses and underscores the need to consider the role of white ideology in shaping how marginalized individuals deal with racism. Without recognizing the
hegemonic systems of power, resilience analysis may inadvertently pathologize youth for not seeking support or challenging discrimination.

In conclusion, this study calls for a critical, contextualized view of resilience, particularly in the context of racism. It underscores the importance of recognizing how white dominance and ideology operate in shaping vulnerabilities and responses to racist encounters. Resilience in the context of racialized minority youth cannot be understood in isolation. It requires considering societal conditions that either support or hinder their well-being. Understanding and challenging these conditions are essential to promoting the well-being and resilience of racially marginalized communities.
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