A CLASS ACT: HOW EAST VANCOUVER WORKING-CLASS YOUTH PERCEIVE RACISM AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

by

PAUL MICHAEL ORLOWSKI

B.Eng., Carleton University, 1982

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August, 1997

© Paul Michael Orlowski
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Educational Studies

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date August 26, 1997
This critical ethnographic study had a two-part general problem statement:

1) How do east Vancouver working-class youth locate themselves in terms of ethnicity and class?

2) How do east Vancouver working-class youth perceive racism and economic inequality?

Twenty-five working-class adolescents from a senior secondary alternative school were interviewed and observed over a six-month period in 1996. The youth belonged to the following ethnic groups: Chinese, Vietnamese, First Nations, White, and Indo-Canadian. Almost all of the participants felt that racism was increasing in Vancouver, although most were only able to recognize more overt forms of racism. The data suggest that all of the participants were very aware of their race or ethnicity. Most of them, however, were unclear about their social class: 22 of the 25 participants described themselves as middle-class. Consequently, they were unable to articulate many class concerns nor how economic power works in our society. Ethnicity seemed to be important in shaping their views toward people of other ethnic and social class backgrounds. By the participants' accounts, parental views toward the Other were very influential in shaping their own views, although there was evidence of changing perceptions, sometimes positive, in the younger generation. All of the groups seemed to hold racist attitudes toward other people. Material concerns appear to be at the root of many of these racist attitudes. White attitudes toward Asian immigrants and First Nations' land claims, Indian parents' discouragement of friendships with White youth, and Asian parents' opinion of Native people are some examples. The study concluded with progressive views toward other ethnic groups and the poor being presented to the participants. Suggestions for curriculum reform that aim to reduce racism by increasing class awareness are included in an appendix.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Acknowledgement

Chapter One  
Introduction
  The General Problem Statement 4
  Significance of the Study 5

Chapter Two  
Literature Review: Framing the Study 6

Chapter Three  
Design and Methodology 16  
  On Language 16  
  Social Network and Site Selection 18  
  Role of the Researcher 21  
  Purposeful Sampling Strategies 23  
  Data Collection Strategies 29  
  Analytic Framework 32  
  On Interviewing and Analyzing 37  
  On Reliability and Validity 39

Chapter Four  
The Social Construction of Ethnic Identity 42  
  The Chinese Students 43  
  The Vietnamese Students 49  
  The First Nations Students 51  
  The White Students 58  
  The Indo-Canadian Students 61  
  A Summary 68

Chapter Five  
Racism and Ethnic Intolerance 70  
  Experiences as Victims of Racism 71  
  The Chinese Students 71  
  The Vietnamese Students 74  
  The First Nations Students 76  
  The White Students 82  
  The Indo-Canadian Students 86  
  A Summary 90
| Chapter Six | Students' Racist Attitudes Toward Others | 92 |
| Chapter Six | The Chinese Students | 93 |
| Chapter Six | The Vietnamese Students | 97 |
| Chapter Six | The First Nations Students | 99 |
| Chapter Six | The White Students | 103 |
| Chapter Six | The Indo-Canadian Students | 111 |
| Chapter Six | Views On Immigration | 116 |
| Chapter Six | A Summary | 121 |

| Chapter Seven | The Social Construction of Social Class | 125 |
| Chapter Seven | The Chinese Students | 127 |
| Chapter Seven | The Vietnamese Students | 134 |
| Chapter Seven | The First Nations Students | 139 |
| Chapter Seven | The White Students | 145 |
| Chapter Seven | The Indo-Canadian Students | 152 |
| Chapter Seven | A Summary | 160 |

| Chapter Eight | Further Analysis: Connecting Previous Research | 164 |
| Chapter Eight | On Relational Positionality and Racial Discourse | 164 |
| Chapter Eight | On Racist Attitudes and Economic Concerns | 169 |
| Chapter Eight | On Class Issues and Class Awareness | 172 |
| Chapter Eight | On Gender | 175 |
| Chapter Eight | Challenging Student Attitudes | 177 |
| Chapter Eight | Risks With Research of This Type | 183 |
| Chapter Eight | On Curriculum and Teachers | 186 |
| Chapter Eight | Final Conclusions | 188 |
| Chapter Eight | Suggestions for Future Research | 193 |

References | 195 |

Appendix 1 | Questions for Individual Interviews | 201 |

Appendix 2 | Suggestions for Curriculum Reform | 203 |
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Ethnographic Sample: Student Profiles  26
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The following people must be thanked for their help, understanding and kindness: my daughter, Katrina; my thesis advisor, Deirdre Kelly, who was the perfect advisor for a person of my disposition; the other thesis committee members, Peter Seixas and Jane Thomas; my partner and fellow east end alternative school teacher, Lois Sanford; my friends/neighbours Barbara Smith, Patricia Graham and Sanjay Khanna; the head administrator in the school I teach at, Pat Mitchell; the Vancouver School Board, for granting me a 5-month paid leave to complete this study; progressive provincial politician, Jenny Kwan, for her feedback and ideas; my best friend since childhood, Stephen Madigan, who encouraged me with words and actions that immigrant working-class “kids” (like the two of us once were) can put forth ideas that look at forms of oppression in our complex world; and lastly, all twenty-five of the participants.

Thank you.
CHAPTER 1
THE INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace to hear people in the social sciences speak of "race" as a category that does not exist. Even conservatives have been heard to utter something to this effect (Omi and Winant, 1993, p.3). This has most likely been borne out of the realization that there are only trivial physical differences between all the groups that comprise the human species. However, as Michael Omi and Howard Winant cogently point out, competing political and social forces demonstrate that the category "race" is very real indeed, and exists as a social construction that has major consequences for many people (Omi and Winant, 1986, p.68). According to Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, "‘race’ is a social, historical and variable category" (1993, p. xv). Once this is recognized we won't have to contend with the reasoning that would have (some of) us believe that since "race" is but an illusion, then there shouldn't be any racism. Not only does racism exist in our society, but according to the biggest daily newspaper in B.C. many people feel it is on the increase (Todd, Vancouver Sun, May 23, 1997, p. A8).

Consider some of the following events that have recently taken place, all relevant to British Columbian society, and representative of only a small portion of issues in ethnic relations in this province. The rise of the federal Reform party has been followed with accusations that it harbours a lot of racist bigots (O'Neil, Vancouver Sun, May 8, 1996, p. A1). At the same time, the B.C. government finds itself under attack from the media for its 1993 anti-hate laws. The lawyer who helped draft this legislation claimed in court that it was designed to make non-White people, including immigrants, feel more comfortable living here (Todd, Vancouver Sun, May 23, 1997, p. A1). Apparently, the provincial government perceived there was a need to do so. Canada's immigration
rates "are the highest per capita in the world" (Todd, *Vancouver Sun*, February 1, 1997, p. C3) and Vancouver is receiving a major portion of these newcomers, primarily from Asia and of Chinese descent (Fraser, *Vancouver Province*, April 16, 1997, p. A6).

Only weeks prior to the anti-hate law backlash, an event took place in the B.C. Legislature that served to demonstrate that tensions between the Chinese and White communities may be worsening. Jenny Kwan, the NDP MLA, moved to adopt the government's Throne Speech, the first Chinese-Canadian ever to do so in B.C., perhaps in Canada. Ms. Kwan completed her remarks in a 4-minute summary in Cantonese, acknowledging her own ethnicity as well as the contributions of the many Chinese-Canadians since the early immigration of labourers helped build the railroad about a hundred years ago in B.C. As she spoke, one of the opposition MLAs, Ted Nebbeling, repeatedly heckled Ms. Kwan by ridiculing her in Cantonese. Afterwards, he claimed to have felt "offended" that he had to listen to Cantonese without knowing what was being said (Smyth, *The Province*, March 30, 1997, p. A6). In Ms. Kwan's opinion, in the process of mocking her, Mr. Nebbeling, who is White, insulted the entire Chinese-Canadian community of B.C., setting back some of the progress multiculturalism programs have accomplished. After all, in the past MLAs in this province have listened to speeches delivered in Punjabi, French and other languages. What is behind the attitude of Mr. Nebbeling and people like him toward the Chinese? More importantly, what effect do events like these, in the political and therefore public arena, have upon ethnic relations in B.C.'s Lower Mainland?

The apparent increase in racist attitudes here is coinciding with high immigration rates from Asian countries. At the same time, we are hearing countless stories heralding the new global economy. The media speak of the shrinking middle class but pay little attention to the working class, especially during these times of mass migration, deficit reduction, and corporate record-breaking profits and down-sizing
(McQuaig, 1995). Furthermore, elements of today's working class appear to be buying into ideas, such as limiting social programs, that only serve to put them at a further disadvantage.

As a teacher in an alternative senior secondary program in Vancouver's east end for the past six years, I have been privy to many conversations and episodes that speak to racist attitudes among the primarily working-class student population. Occasionally, these attitudes result in acts of physical violence, almost always away from the school site. It occurred to me that these students, who are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, have much more in common with each other than they do differences. Their uncertain economic prospects differ little from one ethnic group to the next, yet they often blame each other for what many of them perceive to be bleak times ahead. They seem to pay little or no mind, however, to those who do have some say in what is going on with the economy and social fabric of Canada and, in particular, Vancouver. These thoughts crystallized for me one day when I saw some grafitti on an outside wall of an east end store that read:

CLASS WAR! NOT RACE WAR!

It is the ideology of racism and its dynamics specific to the context of working-class youth and their social relations in east Vancouver that I wanted to research. More specifically, I wanted to see what kind of connections, if any, these young people made between race, racism and their economic futures. To accomplish this, the research took the form of a critical ethnography in which I interviewed and observed twenty-five grade 11 and 12 students from the alternative school I teach at in east Vancouver. These working-class students came from five different ethnic backgrounds. I wanted to know how they were faring in a society that is very different, both in social and economic terms, from the ones their parents and I grew up in. I also wanted to know more about their attitudes toward other "races" as well as toward the wealthy ruling
class and our society's poor people. After all, these young people are hoping to enter the work force in a short time. Was multicultural education doing enough to promote understanding and tolerance? It is my contention that perhaps the school could do more than it currently does to ameliorate the current situation.

THE GENERAL PROBLEM STATEMENT

The general problem statement was borne out of my concern as to why so many of my working-class students held views that were in keeping with recent societal trends: they held fairly strong racist attitudes toward other ethnic groups they were in frequent contact with. Yet, at the same time, the future for all of my students appeared to be uncertain, most likely fraught with periods of unemployment or underemployment for the majority of them. It became obvious to me that social class was a key category that needed to be examined to have a better understanding of racism in this context. I wanted to have a better understanding of the social critiques, if any, they were developing. The general problem statement evolved to its present two-part form:

1. How do east Vancouver working-class youth locate themselves in terms of ethnicity, and class?

2. How do east Vancouver working-class youth perceive racism and economic inequality?

Specifically, I wanted to discover how these adolescents understood and described their ethnic and class identities and what they considered the most important influences shaping these identities. I wanted to explore their perceptions regarding social relations with the Other as well as what links, if any, they perceived between various forms of racial and economic inequalities.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study is straightforward. To my knowledge, there has yet to be an ethnography in the Canadian context that attempts to learn about adolescents' perceptions of ethnicity, racism, and economic inequality in our society and their futures. In light of recent changes in the demographics of the Lower Mainland of B.C. and in the overall economy, it is especially important that we learn about how these young people feel about these issues. After all, these students are on the verge of entering adulthood; indeed, some of them already are legal adults. It is my intention that this study further our understanding in ways that may lead to young people being better able to acquire the citizenship skills necessary to become active, participating members in our democratic society.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW: FRAMING THE STUDY

Much has been written about race and racial or ethnic inequality in the sociology of education during the past two decades. Similarly, there has been a deluge of studies on the effects of social class on one’s life chances and experiences, primarily within the Marxist-informed research of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these have examined the connections between a person’s ethnicity and their social class. However, almost all of this research is set within a binary framework (Friedman, 1995). In the U.S., the unequal relationship between White and Black Americans predominates, while in Canada the conventional dichotomous focus is either on White/First Nations relations or English/French relations. I believe it is time for some research to address the demographic changes many parts of North America are presently undergoing, namely, the transition from western society to postmodern society. By this I mean that certain places, such as Vancouver, are now populated by huge groups of people that have different histories from each other, that have cultural traditions and, in some cases, values that are vastly different from other groups. Hence, social analysis that uses a binary framework is less illuminating in this context.

One ethnography that is particularly relevant to my own study is Paul Willis’s (1977) Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. Although the focus of Learning to Labour was almost exclusively upon class issues of England’s White working class and for the most part ignored issues of ethnicity, it was one of the first critical ethnographies in the sociology of education to garner much attention. Most of this was positive, although feminist critiques demonstrated some important flaws.

Willis produced the first ethnography to study in detail how schools produce social class, in particular, the working class. He used a neo-Marxist perspective to examine
the determinacy of the structuralist-functionalist model, common to many of the studies within reproduction theory (Meighan, 1981). But Willis's work went beyond the reproduction theorists and is therefore of great relevance to me.

Learning to Labour studied the lives of a group of working-class youths, whom Willis labelled "the lads", and their relationship to school. He compared the attitudes and behaviours of the lads to a more obedient group of students, referred to as "the ear'oles". Both groups lived in the same small English manufacturing city. The study took place in the mid-1970s.

Willis's lads rebelled against the path set for them by the hierarchical capitalist British society by resisting the demands of the teachers and the school administrators. They rightly assumed that their schooling was not going to better their lot in life, that they were undoubtedly going to follow in their fathers' footsteps and work in the local factory. In other words, they had "partially penetrated" the dominant ideology and resisted it, whereas the ear'oles bought into it. This demonstration of human agency is crucial to an understanding of the manner in which people can resist the dominant ideology. Although in the case of the lads they did not use their awareness to better their life chances, the agency they employed gave them the capability to resist the dominant ideology, at least to some degree.

In fact, the idea of human agency has had a profound effect within the sociology of education. Early reproduction theories were based upon the notion of determinism, whereby structures would ensure the continued existence of the status quo. For example, the "correspondence principle" claims that schools serve to ensure that the labour needs of capitalism are met by what and how they teach, as well as structuring themselves in a similar manner to common workplaces (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Resistance theory, by highlighting human agency, moves beyond the pessimism of the structural determinism of early reproduction theorists.
Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital was forced to undergo further analysis in light of the notion of human agency. Cultural capital refers to the linguistic and cultural competences that middle-class families possess and schools require for educational success (Bourdieu, 1976). Schools actually exacerbate the economic inequality within our society by not teaching these skills to the working class. Moreover, in my opinion there is a form of cultural capital oriented for the working class that is not being taught to these students. Worker solidarity, the history of unions and the meaning of a picket line are but a few examples.

Resistance theory successfully dismisses the determinism of both early reproduction and cultural capital theories. Therefore, it carries with it an air of optimism. For instance, the agency employed by Willis's lads had the potential to better their situation. Similarly, Ken Osborne suggests that pedagogy, or "the way subject matter is selected, organized and presented to students", can be an avenue of agency for both teachers and students to counteract the dominant ideology (Osborne, 1988, p.21). The idea of agency implies that students and teachers are not merely passive beings but are active in the struggle for self-determination, or if conditions allow, collective movements. There is no guarantee, however, that these social movements are progressive.

A major feature of the dominant ideology within the capitalist system is the separation of knowledge from power (Poulantzas, 1978). Critical pedagogy can create a bridge between the two (Freire, 1973). Once this critical awareness is in the students' minds, power becomes a two-way struggle (Apple, 1985). On the one hand, the ruling class is always attempting to maintain and even increase its power over the subordinate groups, while on the other hand, these same subordinate groups are able to create ways to gain some of the power back. My understanding of this is very similar to the way I perceive Willis's notion of partial penetration. Consequently, my initial set
of questions for the interviews attempted to elicit information pertaining to each student's sense of identity stemming from their own actions, at the school and otherwise. (Refer to Appendix 1.)

The partial penetration idea is obviously a complex one to tease out of a group of adolescents. For instance, it explains the lads' behaviour as they rebelled against their teachers and the path set for them by British society. However, it does not uncover the mechanisms in the system that blocked them from class consciousness. Their reaction was to rationalize their future job prospects, glamourizing employment in the factory as masculine and mental work as feminine. It was primarily in this way that the lads constructed their masculinity.

However, membership was exclusionary along racial or ethnic and gender lines. West Indian and Pakistani peers, presumably on a similar track for future employment, were not only refused entry into the lads' social circles but were the targets of racist jibes, as well. Consequently, it is fair to presume that the degree to which the lads had figured out what the future had in store for them as working-class labourers did not include controlling their racist attitudes. If it had, perhaps they would have a much clearer, broader and less exclusionary perspective of class consciousness. What are the hidden forces that allowed them to identify with members of their own social class only if they were White? Although Willis did not explore this avenue of analysis, it was a part of my research.

A feminist critique of *Learning to Labour* demonstrated that it was not only the racist attitudes of the lads that Willis touched upon superficially. Angela McRobbie deplores the resistance theory Willis puts forth on the grounds that it is based upon working-class males only, without consideration of gender and family, as well as race (McRobbie, 1980). Moreover, the ethnographic techniques Willis employed to build rapport with the lads were taken to such an extreme that the result was collusion in
incredible sexist attitudes that had "violent underpinnings" (McRobbie, 1980). As a teacher, I do not allow sexist or racist remarks in my classroom or on the school grounds. During the research, however, racist remarks were made, especially during the group interviews. After all, it was the attitudes underlying these remarks that interested me. When this occurred, I made sure to put forth alternative views for the students to consider.

I am influenced by the ideas of R.W. Connell, who contends that schools are instrumental in shaping the process of gender formation (Connell, 1989). There is no question that social constructions of femininity and masculinity among the working-class youth are crucial factors in their social relations. Indeed, the research made me aware of particular gender constructions that reinforced both racist and sexist attitudes, while obscuring any sense of class awareness. I chose not to analyze fully how gender construction intersects with the other categories of ethnicity and social class, however, because of the scope of the study.

Learning to Labour spawned other interesting discussions around issues of cultural analysis within capitalist, patriarchal society. Willis demonstrated how one cultural form, the lads, reacted differently to the same socioeconomic circumstances than another cultural form, the ear'oles, who were from the same cultural level, to use his terms. Lakomski contends that Willis committed the ethnographic error of going native and therefore was incapable of seeing other forms of resistance employed by other social groups such as the ear'oles (Lakomski, 1984). I had no intention of going native with my students and consequently was not guilty of the same mistake. However, Lakomski's point was well taken because it illuminates the notion that some forms of resistance are undoubtedly more successful than others in bettering the lives of the dominated group. It is useful to me as a White researcher studying youth from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in that it is obviously more difficult for me to locate forms of
resistance within non-White groups.

Willis was also interested in the participants of his study benefitting from their involvement. Indeed, two goals particular to all critical social theory are the emancipation and politicization of the researched (Gibson, 1986). This very well may include bringing to light forms of resistance that may be more beneficial than others to the participants. These goals are particularly useful when the participants demonstrate elements of a contradictory consciousness (Gramsci, 1971). I am aware of the potential pitfalls associated with a researcher attempting to impose values upon the participants. However, the research involved attempts on my part to challenge some of the students’ racist attitudes, particularly when the study was in its later stages.

To summarize this aspect of the discussion, it was indeed my intention that each of the participants develop a more critical consciousness through involvement with the project. In other words, I hoped that the students were able to gain some insight into the futility of bettering their life chances through an increase in racist attitudes. Rather, I wanted them to understand the economic forces that are working to shape all of their lives, regardless of ethnicity. This activist aspect occurred toward the end of the research and, consequently, I judged it not to have undercut the goal of obtaining knowledge about how the youth locate themselves in terms of ethnicity and class in any significant way.

Another ethnography that provides valuable analysis for my own study is Ruth Frankenberg’s White Women, Race Matters (Frankenberg, 1993). Frankenberg’s goal was to describe “the social construction of whiteness”. She had developed a model to help her analyze a person’s understanding of race. Thirty women of varying ages who all lived in California, but may have grown up elsewhere, were interviewed between 1984 and 1986. Frankenberg’s model is a powerful tool and elements of it informed my own analysis, especially her notions of race and racism as social constructions yet
very "real" in shaping a person's daily experience.

Frankenberg states that the discourse on race throughout the history of the United States can be categorized into three main schools of thought. The first discourse Frankenberg has called "essentialist" because it assumes that White people are superior to all others because of ascribed biological characteristics. The second discourse that became popular in the United States is labelled "colour-blind/power-blind" because it contends that everyone is equal as it ignores historical factors and institutions that serve to oppress some ethnic groups while favouring others in terms of materialism and power. The third, and most recent, discourse began to appear in the mainstream media more frequently in the 1980s. Frankenberg has named this the "race-cognizance" discourse as it recognizes "race" and ethnicity as factors that offer some people privileges while others have to overcome even more obstacles to improve their material standard of living. All three coexist in contemporary America, and sometimes people shift into a different discourse as they get older. Quite often Frankenberg discovered an interweaving of the discourses within a woman's narrative. Similarly, I found evidence of all three discourses among the participants in my research.

A third ethnography that I consider to be very pertinent to my own study is Lois Weis's Working Class Without Work (Weis, 1990). Some of Weis's key concepts proved useful for my research. For instance, she defines identity as "a sense of self in relation to others". Psychologist Kenneth Gergen concurs with Weis's definition, particularly within our postmodern society (Gergen, 1990). This particular notion of identity informed both my data collection strategies, as well as subsequent analysis.

Furthermore, Weis defines society differently from the reproduction theorists. In Weis's words "society is best understood as a dynamic set of social movements - as the material accomplishment of conflicting groups struggling for control of the field of
historical cultural action” (p.10). Weis contends, correctly in my opinion, that youth simultaneously create social movements and are created by them. For Weis, an examination of social movements can shed light upon the forces that are influencing the manner in which youth are constructing their identities. The so-called New Right is one such movement in the U.S., according to Weis. She states:

The focus [of the New Right] on male supremacist family structure, racism, and so forth can be used as a set of identity politics to enable the further extension of a market logic - a logic under which the Traditional Proletariat will suffer enormously and disproportionately in the economic realm. (p. 201)

Competing with the New Right is a powerful yet contradictory social movement, namely, feminism. Weis claims that there is potential for a confrontation on this front in the near future because the goals of both social movements are contradictory. The New Right wants to strengthen the patriarchy even further, while feminism wants to dismantle it in favour of a more egalitarian society. In my own research I looked for signs of both the New Right and feminism in the participants' attitudes.

Weis concludes that even though the American economy is shifting to oppress the working class further, which many people contend is also occurring in Canada (Little, Globe & Mail, April 26, 1997, p. B1; McQuaig, 1995). The resulting working-class resentment is not being directed at the ruling class composed of the major players who helped create the conditions for the shift. Rather, the shift seems to be fueling racist and sexist attitudes. Working Class Without Work is an invaluable study, and one that informed my own research on the important concepts I’ve outlined above, that is, shifting economies, social movements, and their effects on society and the social construction of youth identity.
In describing yet another one of her ethnographies, Lois Weis provides more social research that is important for my study. In *Narrating the 1980s and 1990s*, collaborators Weis and Michelle Fine studied two groups of poor and working-class young men, one Black and the other White, in two different American cities (Weis & Fine, 1996). The researchers' intent is to examine the ways in which both groups of men explained their low socioeconomic position. A major question for them in this work is the extent to which the men are able to identify and connect structures within their society to their own individual troubles. They conclude that "the African American men blame the economy and racism, but white men...blame black males". The extremely important implication of this conclusion is that a large segment of American society, namely the working class, may find themselves embroiled in bitter disputes along ethnic lines as the gap between the rich and poor widens. I explored this very idea among the ethnic groups involved in my study in east Vancouver. In fact, my experience as an east Vancouver high school teacher lead me to speculate before the project even began that racist attitudes are, in the main, borne out of material considerations.

In "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse", Susan Stanford Friedman outlines the need for social research to break away from the binary framework almost always used in the study of race relations (Friedman, 1995, p. 1). While Friedman acknowledges the binary modes of thinking about race and ethnic relations have yielded valuable insights into particular systems of oppression, she feels that they inevitably result in an impasse toward discussing racism and ethnic relations. She cites three ways that the "conventional black and white dialectic" is scripted in the U.S.: the narratives of denial, accusation and confession. These three scripts "suppress an understanding of contradictory subject positions".

14
Recent demographic shifts in the U.S. require that a new narrative script be used, one that can incorporate the complexities that are caused by the "fluid, nomadic, and migratory subjectivities" when more than two groups are living amongst each other. Friedman calls this fourth script the "narrative of relational positionality". Feminism has had to come to grips with the notion that gender is one of a set of categories involved with identity construction in the hierarchical social organization of our society. In this same manner, anti-racist strategies must also come to terms with the multi-ethnic, postmodern society that is quickly developing in many places. Vancouver is one such place.

The four ethnographies that I described and the idea of the relational positionality narrative were instrumental in helping me frame my study. B.C.'s Lower Mainland is rapidly transforming into a postmodern metropolis, and nowhere is this more evident than in Vancouver's east end. To the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be done in B.C. or even in Canada an ethnographic study that examines the construction of adolescent identities in the context of global economic relations and racial formations that oppress the poor and working class. Teaching in Vancouver's east end for the past six years has made me realize that the time has come for one to be done here.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

The basic research design for my study consisted of a series of interviews with regular observations. It was inductive, which is consistent with the critical ethnographic process. The theory that helped guide the analysis was emergent, meaning that much of it was generated during the series of interviews, after reflection with and without the input of the participants, and during subsequent analysis.

ON LANGUAGE

Critiques of modern appraisals of the Other have raised sensitivities about the words we use to describe people who inhabit social locations different from ourselves. Consequently, conundrums often appeared in the ways in which I discussed issues around ethnicity with the participants. Indeed, even the word “ethnicity” was problematic. The UBC Ethics Committee requested a change in my research proposal, suggesting the abandonment of the category “race” in favour of ethnicity. I am familiar with the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant and agreed to this (Omi & Winant, 1986). However, during the data collection period, it quickly became apparent that the students were much more comfortable using “race” rather than the choice of the academy. The transcripts indicate that I followed their lead for the most part, although I interchangeably used “race” and “ethnicity” as one of my analytical categories.

Similarly, I ran into some difficulty over what names to use for each of the ethnic groups in the study. The word “Indian” has posed a problem for many anthropologists for a long time. In a study such as this, in which both First Nations people and those who have ancestry in India are involved, the level of sensitivity and potential for
confusion rise even more. Members of both groups appropriated the term to describe their own people during the interviews. In the analysis, however, I used both First Nations and Native to describe Canada's aboriginal peoples. Ethnic identity politics has been thoroughly debated in places such as Britain, resulting in many scholars with ancestry in India preferring to be called Indian (Brah, 1992, p. 130). However, the context in Canada is much different. Consequently, for the most part, I used the term "Indo-Canadian" when discussing people with roots in the Indian subcontinent. When referring to older generations in their families, I sometimes described them as Indian. These students described themselves as either Indian, East Indian or Brown, although they didn't seem to mind the term I used.

Usage of the term "Oriental" raised its own concerns. While Edward Said's work (1978) has shown many academics the problems involved with this term, the common lay person has attached meaning to it that was difficult to get away from during discussions with the multi-ethnic youth subculture of east Vancouver. Participants with either Vietnamese or Chinese ancestry used "Oriental" to describe themselves as well as people from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines and Cambodia during the interviews. Indeed, I recall hearing renowned environmentalist David Suzuki, a Japanese-Canadian, refer to himself as an "Oriental" during a lecture I attended. Students from all of the other groups represented in the study did likewise. Once again, during the interviews I acquiesced to the common vernacular and refrained from correcting them. In the analysis, however, I used the terms "Chinese" and "Vietnamese", having decided not to hyphenate them with "Canadian" for reasons of brevity. Lastly, I used the term "White" to describe the remaining group in the study, preferring to use the seldom-used capitalized version to show equal respect. All of the parents of the White students were born in Canada, making their children at least second-generation Canadians. Occasionally I referred to this group as European-
Canadian, a term which reminds the reader that the term White encompasses many ethnicities.

SOCIAL NETWORK and SITE SELECTION

The selected social network for my study included twenty-three students from the Spectrum Senior Secondary Alternative Program in east Vancouver, as well as two former Spectrum students who graduated the previous school year. I am one of the five teachers at the school and have taught there for the past six years. In addition to the twenty-five young people who agreed to participate in the study, observations of the entire student body at Spectrum, as well as off-the-cuff comments made in my classroom, helped shape the study.

All interviews and observations took place on the Spectrum campus. This site includes eight portables that form a rectangle with a small courtyard area in the middle and a basketball court to the side. There is a running track and small hill separating Spectrum from Victoria Park Secondary School, the regular school of approximately 1800 students that Spectrum is affiliated with. (Note: Victoria Park is a pseudonym, as are the names for all the regular high schools in Vancouver).

Spectrum is a grade 11 and 12 program that begins each semester with eighty students, finishing on average with about sixty-five. All of the students experienced some difficulty in the regular school system and are considered “at risk” of not graduating from high school by school counsellors. Most of the students dropped out or were “pushed out” of the regular school system (Kelly, 1993).

To gain entry into the program, the students must possess a minimum reading proficiency level of grade 9 and be at least competent in mathematics to pass Math 11A, which is a modified level math course in B.C. More difficult math courses are also
offered. The course selection available to Spectrum students enables them to
graduate with a regular high school diploma and go on to college. However, in order
for a graduate to enter university, they are required to pass a grade 11 course in a
language other than English. Because Spectrum does not offer any such courses, any
student wishing to go to university must receive credit elsewhere. On average, one
Spectrum graduate a year enters university.

In the past the majority of Spectrum students have been of European stock. This is
in sharp contrast to the population at Victoria Park, which has approximately 75% of its
students from an Asian background, 10% European and 15% other. However, there
has been a significant shift the past two years at Spectrum, although the reason for this
is unclear. In the 1995-96 school year, about one-third of the student body was of
European ancestry, over half were Asian (primarily from mainland China, India, Fiji,
Vietnam and the Philippines), with the remainder mostly First Nations. There was
another ethnic shift in 1996-97, with a significant increase in both Latin Americans and
students of African ancestry, while the number of Chinese students dropped
significantly. The vast majority of the students come from families with a socio-
economic status of working class or lower. Slightly more than a third of the students I
have informally polled the past two years have a unionized wage earner in the family.
Approximately 10% of the students live on their own or with friends. Some of these
students are receiving social assistance, while the others work at unskilled jobs.

There is no question that the typical Spectrum student differs from the typical senior
student in one of east Vancouver’s regular high schools. However, from my own
experience in the regular school system, it appears that a significant percentage of the
students in the regular schools have traits, both academically and socially, similar to
those at Spectrum. Indeed, many students in the regular system would undoubtedly
benefit from attending the smaller, more informal format of an alternative program. It
would be incorrect for me to assume that the views of the Spectrum students who participated in this study represent the views of all east-end senior high school students. However, it is my opinion that the manner in which they locate themselves in terms of social class and ethnicity are very similar to the way a large proportion of the working-class youth of east Vancouver do the same.

In recent years, the lower socioeconomic groups have been experiencing rapidly changing conditions in the city. The global economic restructuring with free trade deals, the lack of decently paid openings in union jobs, and the recent influx of Asian immigrants into most areas of the Lower Mainland are major factors in this urban transformation. There are now well over 250,000 Chinese Canadians living in the Lower Mainland, "a 26% increase over last year" (Cernetig, Globe & Mail, Sept. 30, 1995, p. D1). Many of them have come to Canada with a very high economic status. At the same time, real estate prices have soared, which is creating an added financial burden for the majority of Spectrum students and their families. The common perception in the streets is that the increase in property value has been a direct result of Hong Kong immigration.

It is noteworthy that there have been very few Hong Kong immigrants who have studied at Spectrum or at any of the over twenty alternative dropout prevention programs in Vancouver. Perhaps this is because alternative schools are not known or are not respected in this community. However, because of their large numbers here, I felt before the project began that they have had an undoubtedly significant effect in the construction of Spectrum students' identities in ethnic and class terms. Moreover, the Hong Kong presence has influenced how people have related to all people of Chinese extraction, whether they have wealth or not.
ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

For the entire study I was the only person conducting the research, including all forms of data collection. My goal was to get as near as possible to seeing the world from the perspective of the Spectrum students. I agree with the current academic thought that it is impossible for an observer to be completely detached, to be objective in the neutral sense, as some logical positivists maintain (Harding, 1991). Rather, I acknowledge my role in affecting the observations. Furthermore, my own background and biases that I entered the project with undoubtedly had some effect upon the observations, rapport, what questions to ask during the interviews, interpretation of results, and subsequent analysis. Consequently, I feel it necessary to situate myself in the context of the study.

Both of my parents came from working-class Catholic families. Because my Irish mother and Polish father immigrated from England in 1956, I have some idea of the immigrant experience. For example, I understand the tensions many of my immigrant students have with their parents as they construct themselves in our western/postmodern society at the expense of traditional values. My siblings and I went through a similar process with our parents, particularly with our father. Catholicism became a thing of the past for me, being replaced with the so-called hard sciences during my undergraduate years, which, in turn, were discarded for a left-leaning social justice philosophy. Community has become a very important concept for me in my job and where I live. The participants were made aware of my background prior to and during the research. They were also made aware of the overall purpose of the project, namely, to find out how school curriculum can promote a more racially tolerant community in east Vancouver. Indeed, my stance definitely influenced how I shaped the entire project. My political position formed an important element in the subsequent
generation of theory.

In terms of the "appropriation issue" in sociology today, it is my position that values are at least as important as one's background based on ethnicity, class and gender in shaping one's politics. I am aware of the privilege in our society bestowed upon White males. However, I do not think that this warrants my silence on issues of social justice in our complex world. In fact, I often overcompensate for the way I have been socially constructed as an educated male of European ancestry by taking a stand for the more marginalized members of our society. In a study such as this, with participants being from many ethnic backgrounds as well as both genders, I feel that I can justify being the designer and interpreter of the research. For me, there is an imperative to look at how economic or class issues are involved in ethnic relations in east Vancouver.

What proved to be problematic, however, pertained to the fact that there was only one researcher. The scope of the project was very large, thereby keeping me from adequately addressing how historical issues have shaped the present context. For instance, the effects of imperialism and colonialism no doubt linger to this very day. Indeed, White racist attitudes toward First Nations people began during the early contact period. The same can be said of White attitudes toward Asian immigrants, who began to appear in large numbers in the late 1800s (Tan and Roy, 1985, p. 9). Consequently, the project can only be considered a "snapshot", and not an exact one, of ethnic social relations among the working-class youth of east Vancouver.

My role as researcher was not only to study how the students locate themselves in terms of ethnicity and class and their attitudes to racism and economic inequality. There was an action-research component to it, as well. As the research progressed, I challenged some of the participants' racist attitudes and their attitudes toward poor people by providing alternative arguments.
PURPOSEFUL SAMPLING STRATEGIES

The students I selected to participate in the project had to meet certain requirements, not the least being a perceived ability to articulate information pertinent to my research questions. I employed non-probability, purposeful sampling. My original plan was to involve students from the four main ethnic groups at Spectrum: First Nations, Chinese, Indian, and European. However, once the project got underway I became aware of a connection in east Vancouver between the immigrants from mainland China and Vietnam. Hence, I decided to interview the two Vietnamese students, both female, who attended Spectrum during the semester beginning in February, 1996. Students from a mixed ethnicity or middle-class background were not to be included in the study. However, once the project began it became apparent that two of the participants, both female, had parents from different backgrounds: The younger sister of two First Nations females has a Carrier mother and a White father, while another student has a Vietnamese mother and a Chinese father. Both of them live with their respective mothers, spend little or no time with their fathers, and consequently I used their narratives as informing me about the views of the ethnic group that they considered themselves to be, namely, that of their mothers’ cultural background.

Furthermore, to the best of my ability I attempted to choose students who were less likely to “disappear” during the course of the study, ones who were most likely to finish the school year at Spectrum. To determine this I used their performance over the past few years as a guide or simply my intuition regarding a particular student, or both. Attrition did not pose a problem, however, because only three of the twenty-five students dropped out of Spectrum, and two of these returned to do all of the interviews they were asked to do.
Another prerequisite for a participant had to do with social class. I was primarily interested in the social construction of working-class identities. By working-class I refer to families in which the main providers sell their labour power in discrete amounts of time (i.e., hourly wage) or output piecework (i.e., a set wage per piece). Moreover, at the job site the worker must be in an entirely subordinate role as defined in the labour contract. I am also including within the working class those families who do not have a regular wage earner: the “working class without work” (Weis, 1990). In other words, I was only using material considerations in who I included in the working class. The recent employment history of the parent(s) helped me determine the social class of the student participants. The vast majority of Spectrum students do come from families who fall into this category. Consequently, there was not any problem with the recruitment of participants who fit this social class requirement.

Most of the participants in the study were in at least one of my courses. The courses I teach are all at the grade 11 level; the subjects are mathematics, earth science, science and technology, psychology and cultural anthropology, the latter being one that I recently developed for the Vancouver School District. However, there were several participants whom I never had the opportunity to teach. This may have caused some discrepancy. It was not significant, however, as a good level of rapport seemed to be established with all of the students. Two of the students, a First Nations female and an Indo-Canadian male, graduated from Spectrum the previous year. I asked them to participate because both of them I judged to be articulate and able to offer valuable insights into the transition that many young people must find themselves as they mix the traditions of their parents’ culture with western youth culture.

Perhaps surprisingly, I had very little difficulty in recruiting students to participate in the study. There were students who asked several times if they could participate in the interviews but were (kindly) turned down because they did not fit into the social class
or ethnicity requirements. At first, I was concerned about being able to persuade any First Nations males to participate. Two brothers rejected my invitation, politely stating that they had no desire to talk about issues of racism or First Nations identity. I recalled an incident the previous year in which their mother would not allow the boys to go on a school field trip to the downtown eastside because she couldn't see the value of having our students walk in the midst of poverty and despair. The goal of this particular exercise was to have our students recognize that there is a "community" of people who live in the area and that, to the best of their ability given the circumstances, they are active agents attempting to withstand outside pressures to alter this community. In the five years that our staff have done the walkabout, she was the only parent to refuse permission. One can only speculate as to her reasoning, but perhaps the refusal of her sons to participate in the study was connected to their mother's philosophy. In the subsequent interviews and analysis, it became apparent to me that there is a profound reaction that many of the First Nations students have around the issue of abject poverty. Perhaps this particular mother wanted to protect her sons from feeling the pain of others so acutely. In the end, their absence proved not to be a problem as I was able to convince two other First Nations males to participate, both of whom provided intensely deep insights into their particular social location.

After all of these considerations were taken into account, the sample included twenty-five students: 7 First Nations, 5 Chinese, 2 Vietnamese, 5 Europeans, and 6 Indians. All but one stayed with it throughout the entire data collection period. Student profiles can be seen in Table 1.

An obvious caveat is the very small sample set. However, because of the nature of the ethnographic process, to accept more participants would have created an overwhelming situation for me. Nevertheless, the comments of the students and the subsequent analysis must be interpreted with this in mind. This is clearly obvious
when reading the comments given by the two Vietnamese females, but it also applies to the other groups, as well. Another point worth mentioning, related to the first, is that each one of the Asian students in the study were first-generation Canadians, the children of immigrants. This indicates the changing face of Vancouver. It also means that their views are most likely different from fourth- or fifth-generation Canadians of Indian, Chinese and Vietnamese descent. At the least, however, the comments and analysis may be seen as attributable only to the students who were in the study. At best, perhaps they are indicative of how a significant percentage of older adolescents from all five of these ethnic groups in east Vancouver see themselves in relation to the Other during the 1990s.

**TABLE 1: ETHNOGRAPHIC SAMPLE: Student Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name (age)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Family Structure at home</th>
<th>Parent(s)' Occupation(s)</th>
<th>Courses taken from me</th>
<th>Aspirations and miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Tran (19)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>mother.............waitress</td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td>- Earth Science</td>
<td>finishing high school at adult ed centre -wants to go to university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>father.............unskilled labourer</td>
<td>1 sister (15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 sister (15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy Wong (17)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>mother.............hairdresser</td>
<td>1 brother (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-wants to be a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 brother (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mother.............seamstress</td>
<td>2 brothers (15, 12)</td>
<td>- Earth Science</td>
<td>no post-secondary school plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>father.............unskilled labourer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>plans to always work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 brothers (15, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mother.............unskilled labourer</td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td>- Anthropology</td>
<td>wants to study history or own clothes store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>father.............cook (retired)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 brother (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Lam (18)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>mother.............waitress</td>
<td>1 sister (14)</td>
<td>- Mathematics</td>
<td>-wants to own a night club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>father.............construction worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-quit school, project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 sister (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thao Hoang (18)</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>mother.............home-maker</td>
<td>4 brothers (22, 20, 16, 15)</td>
<td>-Science &amp; Tech.</td>
<td>-wants to be a travel agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>father.............fisher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name (age)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Family Structure at home</th>
<th>Parent(s)' Occupation(s)</th>
<th>Courses taken from me</th>
<th>Aspirations and miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rose Chuong (18)</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>mother home-maker family on welfare</td>
<td>-Earth Science -wants to study science</td>
<td>2 brothers (16, 11) father left 11 years ago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Pelletier (19)</td>
<td>First Nations (Carrier)</td>
<td>lives with sister (17) -mother on welfare</td>
<td>-Science &amp; Tech. -Psychology -graduated from Spectrum (June'95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Pelletier (17)</td>
<td>First Nations (Carrier)</td>
<td>lives with sister (19) -mother on welfare</td>
<td>White father unknown -Earth Science -wants college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanie Felix (18)</td>
<td>First Nations (Carrier)</td>
<td>lives with aunt raised on welfare on a northern reserve -cousin to Pelletiers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard Lewis (19)</td>
<td>First Nations (Haida)</td>
<td>mother school worker 2 brothers (12, 10)</td>
<td>-wants to be a police officer on a reserve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Joseph (18)</td>
<td>First Nations (Nisga’a)</td>
<td>mother home-maker 1 brother (15) raised on welfare -Earth Science -Mathematics -wants college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky George (17)</td>
<td>First Nations (Squamish)</td>
<td>mother home-maker 2 brothers (13, 11) father lives in Bella Coola -Earth Science -wants to be a photographer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley Charlie (17)</td>
<td>First Nations (Carrier, Kootenai)</td>
<td>mother home-maker raised on welfare -Mathematics -wants to go to college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy Parkinson (17)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>lives with boyfriend raised on welfare left mother and 2 siblings in Okanagan a year ago -wants to be an artist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Bogdan (18)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>mother home-maker father B.C. Rail worker 4 older siblings live elsewhere -Psychology -Mathematics -wants college, travel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name (age)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Family Structure at home</th>
<th>Parent(s)' Occupation(s)</th>
<th>Courses taken from me</th>
<th>Aspirations and miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diane Thibault (17)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>mother............McDonalds mgr. mom's boyfriend...labourer 1 brother (14)</td>
<td>-Psychology -Mathematics</td>
<td>-wants to be teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Bouchard (19)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>mother............prof. counsellor has a First Nations ex-step-father</td>
<td>-Anthropology -Science &amp; Tech</td>
<td>-wants to be electrician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Allen (17)</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>mother............home-maker step-father......construction work 1 brother (15) 1 half-sister (6)</td>
<td>-Psychology -Mathematics</td>
<td>-lived up north until 11 -wants to be counsellor -involved in gang fights with Chinese youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baijinder Dosanjh (18)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn. (Sikh)</td>
<td>mother..........nurse sister (22) lived with father for 5 yrs until 2 yrs ago in Calif.</td>
<td>-Earth Science</td>
<td>-wants to go to college -quit Spectrum, not project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronnie Prasad (17)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn. (Hindu)</td>
<td>mother..........hospital worker 2 brothers (19, 15) father, salesperson, left</td>
<td>-Earth Science</td>
<td>-wants to be firefighter or plumber</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy Bhatti (18)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn. (Sikh)</td>
<td>mother.......home-maker father.......construction worker 2 sisters (21, 14) 1 brother (16) 2 grandparents...retired 2 aunts, 1 uncle, their spouses and children</td>
<td>-Mathematics -Anthropology</td>
<td>-parents had arranged marriage, want same for their kids -wants college, not arranged marriage -younger siblings go to Sikh school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moe Argun (19)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn. (Hindu)</td>
<td>mother..........nurse 2 brothers (16, 13) father, a car mechanic, left family 7 yrs ago</td>
<td>-Science &amp; Tech. -Mathematics</td>
<td>-graduated from Spectrum(June'95) -works full-time at an auto tune-up place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Yusuf (18)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn (Moslem)</td>
<td>mother..........home-maker father..........factory worker 2 sisters (16, 14)</td>
<td>-Science &amp; Tech. -Mathematics</td>
<td>-wants to be a cosmetician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herb Kullar (18)</td>
<td>Indo-Cdn (Sikh)</td>
<td>mother..........home-maker father..........truck driver 1 brother (15) 1 sister (10)</td>
<td>-Mathematics -Earth Science</td>
<td>-wants to go to college -quit one semester to go to India for 3 mos. with his family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

The two main sources of data for the project were interviews and observation. As well, classroom episodes and written assignments from Spectrum students who were not official participants in the study informed me of ethnic and class relations. The vast majority of the data collection occurred during the last six months of the 1995-96 school year, beginning in January and ending in June, 1996.

Before the actual data collection began, I piloted the interview questions with two students who were not part of the study. This helped me improve my listening and probing techniques, as well as helped me work through the bugs with my audio-recording equipment. All of the interviews, including the pilot interviews, were tape-recorded. Further, I gained a little insight into what questions to drop or change from my initial set of interview questions.

The initial set of interviews were in a one-on-one format with each of the students. Most of the interviews took place in my classroom after school hours. On average, these interviews lasted about an hour and were reflexive, by which I mean that the interaction was shaped by both the student and myself. The initial set of questions definitely guided me through the interviews, but I was somewhat flexible, improving in this aspect as more interviews were completed, changing directions during the interview if the conversation warranted it. The individual interviews began in late January and were completed in early May of 1996, averaging about two a week.

A few of the participants were quiet and answered each question with fairly short responses. In particular, two of the First Nations female students and one of the Chinese males appeared to feel somewhat uncomfortable during the individual interviews. In fact, the one quiet Chinese participant, Raymond Lam, dropped out of
the Spectrum program in March, 1996. He was the only one of the twenty-five participants to end his involvement in the project before it had finished. Jennifer Tran and Baljinder Dosanjh dropped out of school but continued their involvement with the study. Both came back to Spectrum for the remaining events that I requested of them, and said that they found participating a very interesting experience for them.

After the twenty-five individual interviews were completed, I interviewed the students again, this time in a group format, with all of the students from one ethnic group being interviewed together. For instance, I interviewed all six Indo-Canadians at once. The only modification to this format occurred when I interviewed the two Vietnamese-Canadians with four of the original five Chinese-Canadians. All of the group interviews took place after school in my classroom. Each one lasted between one and a half and two hours. It was easier to convince students to participate with the offer of dinner, with all but three of the original twenty-five showing up. Perhaps it was because of the students' socioeconomic position that they seemed especially grateful for this small payment. The four group interviews took place in May.

During the round of group interviews, certain characteristics appeared that were not as obvious in the individual interviews. For instance, the First Nations students who seemed reluctant to speak openly to me during the individual interview were much more talkative and willing to discuss racial and class issues in the group format. The group discussion that took place around the effects of systemic racism on their peoples illuminated the wisdom they all seemed to possess on this painful topic. All of these students appeared to feel very comfortable during this interview.

The group interview with the five White students revealed a more disturbing way that they regard the Other in that they were much more openly racist. I found myself suggesting alternative views, often stated in a socratic manner. For example, I put forth the notion of White privilege and systemic racism against the marginalized such as
First Nations people. A few of them seemed to understand these concepts. The group interview with the White students made me realize the imperative to challenge both their racist views and their attitude toward poor people. I decided that a final meeting of all the participants should take the form of a lecture and discussion.

The last meeting with the participants involved almost all of them together in my exceptionally crowded portable during the first week of June. It lasted approximately ninety minutes and was also audio-taped. My role became more activist as I attempted to illuminate commonalities among all working-class people, regardless of ethnicity. At this point, the study became more action-research oriented. Some examples of this lecture and the students' responses are included in the final chapter.

There was ample opportunity to triangulate my data by observing the students in the school environment. Some of these observations were recorded after the fact, relying on my memory for the most part. I used a formal schedule for the observations: for every school day from the beginning of February until the end of May, I observed the students in the smoking area during the 15-minute morning break and during the lunch period, as well as in the school lunch room as they ate. As mentioned earlier, I also used information obtained from written assignments required for either Psychology 11 or Cultural Anthropology 11, both courses that I have taught at various times at Spectrum. However, classroom assignments proved to be less of a source of insight than I originally thought, mainly because of all of the information obtained via interviews and observations. (I ended up with over 750 pages of interview transcripts to examine!) As well, I was informed by overhearing or participating in informal conversations with the students, regardless of whether or not they were official participants, particularly during the period of January, 1996 until January, 1997.

There were two other sources of data I used to add to what the students were saying. From late 1995 until June of 1997, I read almost daily newspaper accounts of
ethnic and class issues, primarily in the Vancouver Sun. These were used for comparative purposes, allowing me to see how the students' perceptions differed from mainstream views as stated in polls and by the journalists themselves. In August, 1996, I also interviewed Jenny Kwan, a leader in the Chinese community and one of the first Chinese-Canadian provincial politicians, for her feedback on some of the views of the Chinese students. Both the newspaper accounts and Ms. Kwan's opinions proved to be valuable sources of information for the study.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

In general terms, this study is primarily concerned with how working-class youth in east Vancouver view themselves in relation to the Other. More specifically, I wanted to learn how their racist attitudes are affected by the changing economy, changes that seem to be putting even more stress on the working class than on other people. In other words, I began the project with the idea that the nature of the changing economy was causing anxiety in the working class, an anxiety that translated into increased racist attitudes.

To determine who belonged to the working class, I only looked at the manner in which income was brought into the household that the participant grew up in. In other words, material considerations were the sole factor in how I used the term "working class". I acknowledge that other factors, such as level of education, values and lifestyle, are very important when discussing social class. I am also aware that the boundaries between social classes seem to be more blurred when one considers all possible factors. For the purposes of this study, however, the manner in which income was brought into the household was the only consideration I used. My reasoning for this was that I wanted to explore the dynamic between ethnic tensions and racist
attitudes with the prospect of a bleak economic future. Because the shifting economy appears to be negatively affecting the working class in Canada more than other people, I felt that material considerations were the best (and easiest) way to determine a student's social class.

I have already mentioned that Vancouver is undergoing a transformation from a predominantly western society into a postmodern society. By postmodern, I refer to the fragmenting sense of connection many people have toward others which, in turn, can lead to a loss of a sense of community. In part, this process of fragmentation seems to be occurring here because of the degree to which so many people have lead and are leading extremely dissimilar lives from one another, ethnicity being one of the main factors. This is why, in my opinion, Susan Stanford Friedman's notion of "relational positionality" makes sense as a way to understand how people are viewing themselves in relation to others (Friedman, 1995).

The idea of the relational positionality narrative influenced how I framed my interview questions for my participants. For instance, I wanted to know how the First Nations students viewed White people, with whom contact has been long and extremely difficult, and how they perceived, say, Chinese people. Their responses demonstrated why it was time for the old binary frame of First Nations/White relations to be discarded, at least in the highly urbanized Lower Mainland. I asked similar questions of all five ethnic groups. Quite often, the immigration issue illuminated the concept of the shifting subjective position of many of my students within the realm of ethnic relations.

The analysis was forced to move through even more complex territory when I applied the categories of gender and class to ethnic relations. Gender was not a major category in this study, however, although there were many times when I had to use it as an analytical category. An example of this occurred when I attempted to elicit from
the working-class female Chinese participants whom they considered to be potential marriage partners. There was no question as to the futility of the old binary models of analysis in this context. The relational positionality narrative was in full evidence in this situation.

In order to examine ethnic relations, I used Ruth Frankenberg’s notion of describing people’s narratives on racial or ethnic matters in terms of the three discourses that she feels have historically dominated American racial attitudes. The first major discourse on race Frankenberg labels “essentialist”. In short, this position claims superiority for one racial group, the Whites, over everyone else based on ascribed biological characteristics. Most people associate this position with the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups in Canada and the United States. Does essentialist racism inform members of other racial and ethnic groups as well? I explored this thought during the data collection and analysis.

A second discourse on race rose to prominence in the U.S. during the middle decades of the twentieth century, according to Frankenberg. She calls this “color-evasiveness/power-evasiveness” because a person influenced solely by this perspective tends to overlook societal structures, institutions and historical factors that exacerbate material inequality in U.S. society. This movement asserts that beneath the skin “we are all the same” and materially, everyone has the same chances in U.S. society. In this discourse, people’s inability to make it is seen as their own doing and not because of injustices within the society.

In the 1980s, a third discourse on race and racism developed out of feminism, primarily by women of colour. Frankenberg calls this the “race-cognizance” discourse, and it is also based on difference. However, the similarities with essentialist racism end there. Race cognizance claims that inequality does not refer to ascribed characteristics but to the social structure. Frankenberg contends that although the
colour- and power-evasive discourse displaced essentialist racism as the dominant public debate, it has not been displaced by the race cognizance position. I used Frankenberg's three-discourse model on the assumption that the dominant public debates on race and racism have followed a similar historical path in Canada as in the United States.

Frankenberg's major conclusion is that "whiteness" does shape a person's daily experience. She found that a person's attitude toward race and racism are very much determined by their social class, age and geographical origin. My ethnography included people from five different ethnic groups (i.e., not only Whites). I examined an extension of Frankenberg's findings for all of the groups: How does a person's ethnicity work in determining to what extent the ideology of racism has influenced them?

The model I used to study the ideology of racism includes five different forms and was taken from a Canadian book entitled Unequal Relations (Elliott & Flera, 1993, pp. 57-69). These forms I had in mind before I started the data collection and were slightly modified from the original definitions. I believe that all of these forms working together in a myriad of ways are creating an atmosphere of ethnic intolerance in east Vancouver. Here are brief descriptions of each, with references to Frankenberg's taxonomy of racial discourses:

1. **REDNECK RACISM**: highly personal, conscious, deliberate attacks on member(s) of groups perceived as culturally or biologically inferior; sometimes referred to as "overt" racism; this form mostly falls into what Frankenberg refers to as the "essentialist" discourse.

2. **POLITE RACISM**: an attempt, either deliberate or unconscious, to disguise racist attitudes through behaviour that outwardly is non-prejudiced or discriminatory in appearance; sometimes referred to as "covert"
racism; it can be considered as part of either an "essentialist" attitude or a "colour-blind" attitude to racial issues.

3. **SYSTEMIC RACISM:** the adverse impact of apparently neutral laws or programs upon those ethnic minorities whose cultural values and social circumstances are in conflict with the mainstream; this form has been highlighted by the race-cognizance discourse.

4. **NEW RACISM:** a pervasive and lingering sense of unease by those who normally regard themselves as non-prejudicial, often found in situations where two or more cultures are in the early stages of contact; this form is very similar to the anthropological concept of "ethnocentrism" and is a derivative of the essentialist position.

5. **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM:** conscious, overt laws or programs deliberately or inadvertently made to discriminate against ethnic minorities. This form is highlighted in the race-cognizance discourse.

The narratives students gave on ethnic relations provided me with the main source of data that I subsequently analyzed using these five forms of racism. Moreover, I used Frankenberg's model of racial discourses to determine how best to address racist attitudes in curriculum reform. In other words, the frequency and degree to which the students used the discourses helped me learn how best to suggest curricular changes. The race-cognizance discourse is of particular importance in the design of progressive anti-racist curriculum. In today's multi-ethnic Vancouver, none of this would have been possible without bringing the concept of relational positionality into the analysis.
ON INTERVIEWING AND ANALYZING

I have spent eleven years as a high school teacher and can say in all honesty that I am very grateful that I have been able to make this my chosen career. For whatever reason, classroom management has never been a problem for me, despite what I would describe as my easy-going teaching style. Consequently, I was not surprised when it became apparent to me that building rapport was not going to be difficult with the twenty-five participants in this study. (I was quite surprised, however, when I received phone calls from two of the students who had dropped out of school, asking when they were to appear next for the project!)

After a few interviews, I began to think I was a natural at it, that is until I listened to the audio-tapes. There is no question that I would be fired on the first day as an on-air radio interviewer, uttering all sorts of sounds, such as "oh yeah" and "okay", at any time, in attempts to acknowledge what the interviewee was saying. As the research continued, I know I improved in this respect, but I'm quite certain that CBC would not be interested in replacing Peter Gzowski with me. Despite this acknowledgement, my questioning techniques also improved as the interviewing process went on. I was able to apply a flexible, probing approach, changing direction as a participant opened up a new path of inquiry. Sometimes this resulted in a new analytical category, especially after studying the transcripts.

The group interviews were quite a different experience from the one-on-one interviews that preceded them. It quickly became apparent to me that most of the students were more likely to offer different information than in the individual format. Sometimes the information was disturbing, as with the White students and their views toward immigration. At other times, there was a jovial atmosphere, as with the six Chinese and Vietnamese students, during which there were several outbursts of
collective laughter. And at other times, my Whiteness became all too apparent, such as during the First Nations group interview when the discussion turned to systemic racism against their peoples and brief periods of silence would descend upon the group. These were times when it was best to begin asking questions on a different topic. Overall, however, I thoroughly enjoyed all of the group interviews and felt that the students did as well.

Transcribing the interviews was a very arduous process, as any ethnographer can attest. I transcribed the first three of the individual interviews before I decided to pay someone to do the next twenty-two of them. Logistics dictated, however, that I be the one to transcribe all of the group interviews for the simple reason that I was the only person who could recognize all of the voices. When all the transcribing was finished, there were over 750 pages of transcripts to study.

It took me several weeks of pouring over the transcripts to create a set of analytical categories that I could use for the thesis. In fact, initially I used forty-one categories as column headings on charts. Underneath each heading I would mark down what page of each transcript something was said that I considered to say something about that particular category. For practical purposes, however, this list shrank considerably. Often I collapsed categories. For example, femininity, masculinity, and patriarchy were all placed within the category of gender. This part of the research was time-consuming but fairly enjoyable, as I was able to glean many insights into the social relations of the participants during this process. Some of these I was able to bring to the attention of the students, obtaining their agreement on most of them. Occasionally they disagreed with me, while at other times what I had to say was a new insight for them as well. I came to the conclusion that at least some of the students were also benefitting from this reflexive process.

The data analysis has been divided into four major chapters: notions of ethnic
identity, experiences as victims of racism, racist attitudes, and notions of class. The analytical categories did not always fit nicely into one chapter and I was forced to deal with overlaps either by repeating something or by making a decision to make it fit into one of the major chapters. For instance, it appeared that what was often a catalyst for the development of an ethnic identity was having to contend with racism. Ethnicity/class intersections in the data created more overlaps. I had to spend much energy in attempting to disentangle these complex social relations. In the final analysis, I had to make choices as to what analytical categories I would use and where I would use them. I became very aware of the uncharted waters I had entered with my project.

Throughout the entire project, however, one thing was very clear to me. I felt that I was in a very fortunate situation even to be able to hear the narratives of these twenty-five young people. They provided me with details of their lives, details that enrich me as a person, that enable me to comprehend better the colourful east Vancouver neighbourhoods. Because of this research, anywhere I go, by bus or by foot, I am constantly engaged in the stories I see in front of me, stories of people from diverse ethnicities, social classes, age groups, and so forth. And, lastly, there is no doubt that as awareness and appreciation of all the diversity that Vancouver has to offer has increased, I have become a much more sensitive, and better, teacher. I feel honoured to have been told these narratives.

ON RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

I do not feel it useful to specify universally applicable procedures and criteria in qualitative work such as this. In my opinion, it is up to the reader to decide to what degree any aspect of the study can be generalized to apply elsewhere. A few
comments regarding reliability and validity, however, may be prudent at this point.

In order to have some sort of check on reliability and validity, I employed two techniques: respondent validation and triangulation. According to Sara Delamont, respondent validation enables the participants the opportunity to recognize the validity of the emergent theory developing from the analysis (1992, p. 158). After all of the individual interviews were completed and transcribed, I attempted to find patterns and commonalities in the students' attitudes toward other ethnic groups and other social classes. During the second round of interviews, in which the participants were grouped according to ethnicity or race, I would ask them to comment on my analysis. This proved to be a fruitful endeavour, as the emergent theories often became more clear, for both the participants and myself. Occasionally, one or more of the students would put forth a different, but not necessarily more valid, analysis than my own. I mention these discrepancies throughout the chapters on data analysis.

Triangulation was accomplished by comparing what the students said in the interviews to the regular observations I made around the Spectrum campus. In this manner, I was able to triangulate between the two methods of data collection. Triangulation helped uncover a discrepancy on at least one occasion in this study.

Although I attempted to be as unbiased as possible, I am aware that the researcher cannot help but affect the data. The politics of identity that I have constructed myself from undoubtedly affected all aspects of the research, from my rapport with the students, to the questions that I asked them, and to the subsequent analysis. For instance, it is my opinion that most poor people are not lazy and that most unemployed people would accept a job that provided them with any degree of dignity. Indeed, even the two-part general problem statement implies a leftist perspective. By definition, however, the role of the critical ethnographer is to participate in a counter-hegemonic discourse (Brodkey, 1987). I agree with Brodkey's assertion that the researcher must
attempt to recognize and articulate hegemonic practices within society and education so that justice may be attained. I recognized my own biases throughout the interviewing process. However, I am also aware of the impossibility of an unbiased ethnographer, especially one whose aim it is to illuminate these hegemonic practices. Hence, I proceeded with an attempt to help students critically reflect on some of their views, particularly after the initial round of individual interviews. In the last chapter, I discuss the degree of success I managed to attain in this endeavour.
CHAPTER 4
The SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of ETHNIC IDENTITY

The category of "race" has become somewhat contentious in the social sciences in recent decades (Omi and Winant, 1986). The term "ethnicity", however, is problematic for me in this study. Many students that I classify as belonging to the same ethnic group do, in fact, have a different ethnic background. For instance, of the seven First Nations participants, four are Carrier, one Haida, one Nisga'a, while one has the mixed background of Squamish and Bella Coola. Similarly, the five White students constitute a mixture of European nationalities in their backgrounds, even if they themselves have difficulty in identifying their own ancestry as anything more specific than European. The problem magnified with the ethnic category "Indo-Canadian". Of course all six students had both biological parents from Indian ancestry. However, there were three religions involved: Sikh, Hindu and Moslem. Religion is an extremely important aspect of Indian culture. As well, the two Hindu males were from families that had spent a few decades in Fiji after leaving India and before arriving in the Lower Mainland.

There seemed to be no clear answer on which term to use. After much consideration and reflection, I decided that the best route for me was to use both the categories of ethnicity and race in the analysis of the participants' identity construction, as problematic as it may be. In fact, it appears that all of the groups exhibited the problematic of waning ethnicity in comparison to their parents. This is not surprising, as anyone can attest who is a first- or second-generation Canadian (like I am).

The following sections describe how the students from each of the ethnic groups in the study perceive their own group identity at this point in time. I consider these descriptions to be a "snapshot" only, since culture is a dynamic process that never
stagnates. The students already appear to be changing in their ethnic identity from the descriptions they gave of their parents.

One of the questions all of the participants were asked in the individual interviews was, “When was the first time you considered yourself to be _______?” This question often had the effect of allowing the student to open up with their response, many of them speaking about why they sought school friends from within their own culture. Comfort levels, with references to language and to racism, and parental attitudes were both cited by most of the students as factors that helped develop some sort of ethnic identity. Some of them, particularly Indian and First Nations students, were taught about their culture and history by family elders. These notions were the basis for this chapter that attempts to look at how these students see themselves in terms of ethnicity. In other words, how they came to realize their ethnicity, why they chose their friendships, and how they came to know their cultural traditions and history and their feelings about these things were the main analytical categories I used here. Obviously, there are other components to all of the identities of these ethnic groups. From the data I collected, however, these aspects seemed to me to represent best how people perceive themselves in relation to others in terms of ethnicity.

Many references to social class and racism will only be discussed superficially here because there are chapters to follow that deal specifically with these issues. The processes by which groups form along ethnic lines will be examined in this section in some detail. How other people see each group, often through ethnic stereotyping, will be discussed in chapter 6.

THE CHINESE STUDENTS and ETHNIC IDENTITY

[My parents] would prefer me to get married to a Chinese girl...probably because of the language thing. They want...our kids to speak Chinese, to look Chinese. You know, to be Chinese, to keep the culture going.
Three of the five Chinese students were born in Canada. Despite this, none of them spoke English until they entered elementary school. Even today, all of them only speak their first language, either Cantonese or Mandarin, with their parents and other family members. When asked when they first considered themselves to be Chinese, each of them except one had the same response: the first day of kindergarten. The following exchange with Nancy Wong demonstrated how this process works:

PO: In elementary school what ethnic groups did your friends belong to?
Nancy: They were all Chinese.
PO: Why was that?
Nancy: When I started school I didn't know how to speak English. So I had to learn English in elementary... If I were to see a Chinese person, sometimes I might say a few words of Chinese, just to communicate... When I was in elementary school I always thought that the Caucasian people were more outspoken while the Chinese people were really quiet. So, I don't know. All of my friends were sort of like me and we felt more comfortable around each other.

In this exchange we can see how the level of comfort, based on the perceived cultural traits relating to speech, is a factor in the process of "ethnic grouping". It is understandable that young children would want to befriend their peers who make them feel the most comfortable. Indeed, the same process occurs with all age groups. Consequently, a person's language and the manner with which they speak it, obviously related, create an atmosphere of comfort or of anxiety in the experience of elementary school children. Because many of the recent Chinese immigrants have children who do not speak English upon entering the public school system, the desire to bond with other Chinese students is obviously even magnified further. After all, they
have spent virtually all of their pre-school lives able to communicate freely with their family members. It makes sense that they would group around a common language, if nothing else, when they leave the home to go to school.

The exception in the group of participants that first noticed other ethnic groups in kindergarten was Jennifer Tran. She was around 10 years old and living in Ottawa before she became aware of the social world of ethnic diversity.

Jennifer: I'm pretty sure it was when I was around ten years old maybe. I'm not quite sure... When I went to school that was when I started um acknowledging um the different races. And racism as well. Like some girl at school called me a Chink. It was when I first recognized racism. And when I first realized I was different.

This somewhat painful account demonstrates how the ideology of racism can actually strengthen the ethnic identity of a group. I can recall a few of my own Jewish friends explaining to me that if anti-Semitism were to disappear, the Jewish culture would shortly disappear, as well. It is not difficult to see how school children would try to avoid people who attempt to make them feel inferior and instead move toward people who are more like themselves. Hence, we may assume that both racism and familiarity are major factors in the process of ethnic grouping.

One of the Chinese students, David Yu, shows that not all members of the same ethnic group have the same elementary school experience regarding relations with the "Other". He explained that although he had non-Chinese friends in elementary school, today his circle of friends is much more homogeneous.

PO: When you were in elementary school did you have friends who were not Chinese?
David: Yeah. Lots of them. We would play all the time.

PO: What ethnic groups would your friends belong to?
David: Mostly White. Or Italians.

PO: What about today? What ethnic groups would most of your friends be?

David: Most are Chinese. Some are Vietnamese. That's it.

PO: I wonder when and why that switch happened. Do you think...

David: It probably started in high school. I went to Birmingham [Secondary], right. And there were a lot of Italians. And there were a lot of Chinese, too. And sometimes there'd be fights between them...I don't know. I would just start having Chinese friends. It was easier...When you're little everybody's the same. You don't notice anything different.

David's comment that "it was easier" could easily translate to "it was safer" to spend time with fellow Chinese people rather than, say, Italian students. This speculation is based upon his perception, real or otherwise, that there seemed to be a lot of tension between the two most dominant ethnic groups at Birmingham Secondary during the early 1990s: the Chinese and the Italians. Once again, it is plain to see how racism, or at least ethnic tensions, is responsible for ethnic grouping, which in turn, has a profound effect upon a group's ethnic identity.

David's high school experience reinforces the common perception that in today's typical east end high school groups composed only of Chinese students seem to be even more pronounced. Students from each of the other ethnic groups in the study mentioned this perception, particularly with reference to Chinese people. The descriptions the five Chinese participants offered of their present-day friendships are not in conflict with this common perception: the two males have only Chinese and Vietnamese friends, two of the females have only Chinese friends, while the third female has Chinese, Vietnamese and White friends. Lydia Leung described another account of how ethnic grouping is reinforced in the high school:
Lydia: It's because of society. Society pushes people into their own races. You stick to your own because other groups won't accept a person that's different...I wouldn't mind having a Caucasian friend but my Chinese friends wouldn't want them around...Maybe it's because of language problems. I don't know. So I don't bother.

Are a person’s comfort level, peer pressure and ethnic tensions on the school site the only causes for the high degree to which ethnic grouping takes place? No. The home provides the role models required to encourage this dynamic. Four of the five Chinese students said that their parents have only Chinese friends. The only exception to this is Nancy Wong. Her mother, a hairdresser, also has several White friends. Nancy explains that her mother’s attitude toward her own ethnic group has shifted in a more negative direction in recent years, mostly because of how much trouble she perceives that Chinese male youth are getting into with the police. She would prefer her son to make friends with White kids.

This rather surprising attitude is definitely the exception, but it may convey something about the nature of culture itself, let alone Chinese culture. Nancy’s mother’s assertion that “Chinese kids are becoming really bad now” strongly implies a change that she has perceived within her own culture. It suggests what social research has found for decades, namely, that culture is not a reified entity but rather adapts to changing conditions around and within it. Whether Nancy’s mother is correct in her view toward Chinese youth is not the issue here. The main point to be made is that no culture is static, that any attempt at description can, at best, only be considered to be how aspects of it may have looked at the time of the data collection.

To look a little closer at Nancy’s mother’s view, however, can provide some insight into tensions that many immigrant families, regardless of ethnicity, must contend with. Her perspective appears to be congruent with the experience of many immigrant
families, no matter where the point of origin, whose elders are deeply troubled by the younger generation’s drift away from traditional values as they become more “westernized”. Nancy’s mother may not be looking at the factors that may lead a boy, Chinese or other, to enter into criminal activity with his peers. She may be basing her view on what she herself sees, or she may be influenced by the non-Chinese mainstream perception that many Chinese adolescents become involved with criminal activity. The fact that she is the only one of the parents who has White friends, however, leads me to speculate that she herself is becoming more westernized rather than holding on to traditional values of Chinese culture.

One other positive connection to western culture was made by Jennifer. She described a situation where her car broke down at the side of a busy road in Richmond, which is generally considered to be the suburb with the highest concentration of Chinese people in the Lower Mainland. She stood there as many Chinese people drove past. Eventually, a White man stopped and managed to help get her car going again. Jennifer expressed a lot of gratitude to what she considers to be a very positive trait among many White people, that of stopping to help a stranger. Her contention is that in Chinese culture the emphasis is on “minding your own business”, a characteristic that, although it has some merit, Jennifer feels is an obstacle to what she considers to be a "higher" value: to help others, even if you don’t know them.

Two other very important values that most of the Chinese students revealed about themselves and their culture are the notions of hard work and the accumulation of wealth. Many scholars speculate that Confucianism is at the heart of these particular values of traditional Chinese culture (Maclear, 1994, p. 55). This will be discussed in much detail in a following chapter examining notions of social class. Many of these traditional Chinese values are learned vicariously, of course. One of the students,
however, was given a sort of formal instruction in certain aspects of Chinese culture, particularly around issues of spirituality. Lydia Leung explained a little of this:

*Lydia:* My mother always wanted me to learn about Chinese culture. She would always make me do things like kneel before photos of ancestors. Out of respect, you know? And like, my mom would burn things. She would teach me about these things. Some of them would make me laugh, though. I'm like, growing up in Canada and it's too different. Some of the Chinese stuff is kind of strange.

Lydia's comments demonstrate two things. First, the desire on the part of her mother for her daughter to learn the traditional ways of Chinese spirituality is apparent. Second, the difficulty that this desire poses for both of them is that much of the meaning of the rituals her mother engages in is lost on Lydia. Lydia is “growing up in Canada” and, consequently, is either consciously or unconsciously distancing herself from certain aspects of traditional Chinese culture. This is indicative of what many immigrant families have to contend with. It is also another example of the adaptability of a culture when the conditions change.

**THE VIETNAMESE STUDENTS and ETHNIC IDENTITY**

*For Vietnamese money is what makes who you are and that's why it makes other people hang around with you. If you don't have money they don't want to associate with you at all...And that's exactly how it is in Vietnam, too.*

Rose Chuong, age 18

As mentioned earlier, because of the small number of representatives for all of the ethnic groups, interpretations and analysis must be read with caution. For no group is this more apparent than with the Vietnamese. The two students who participated, both female, were asked to do so because I was becoming aware of a unique type of relationship between the Chinese immigrants and the Vietnamese immigrants that I
knew nothing about and wanted to explore further. Hence, I urge all readers to be aware that I interviewed only two students from Vancouver’s Vietnamese community.

Similar to the Chinese students’ experience but even more pronounced, both Vietnamese girls considered themselves to be Vietnamese the very first day they arrived in Canada from Vietnam. However, there may only be speculation on Thao Hoang’s part, as she moved with her family via a sponsor program to Prince Edward Island when she was only two. Rose Chuong was seven years old when she and her family arrived. She has a completely different take than the Chinese students as to how language influenced her choice of friends:

Rose: Yeah, well nowadays I hang out with more Vietnamese. Before I hang around with, like, Chinese, um, Hindus, or anybody...I didn’t want to associate with Vietnamese...because I didn’t like their attitude towards people. And because I wanted to learn English. Cuz all they do all day is talk Vietnamese. They don’t talk English. Yeah, they don’t adapt to uh the environment, right. And I wanted to succeed in my school and I learned the language, right?

Rose’s strategy of wanting to learn English as quickly as possible so that she can do well at school is understandable. It also indicates her belief, at least at that time, that the meritocracy system is in good working order here in Canada. This is also understandable. However, Rose appears to feel that the Vietnamese culture that she came from has certain values that she despises, that she considers inferior. Rose doesn’t like “their attitude towards people”. Rose’s quote placed at the beginning of this section may indicate why. Several times during informal conversations after the actual interviews Rose expressed disgust at people who were completely influenced in social relations by the concepts of wealth and power.

Why are most of Rose’s friendships today with Vietnamese people? Her comments provide some insight into this:
Rose: St depends if they’re fresh from the boat. It means like if you just came here then you think money is everything. But for Vietnamese people who’s grown up here um...they’re basically westernized. They don’t care about money.

PO: And your Vietnamese friends today have spent most or all of their lives here?
Rose: Yeah, that’s right. They don’t care about money. Well, not so much.

Rose’s assertion that the Vietnamese people who have grown up here are much more westernized should surprise no one, although she can only be speaking comparatively when she says that Vietnamese people who have grown up here are “basically westernized. They don’t care about money”. After all, the vast majority of people I know have at least some concern for personal money matters. This same dynamic, however, has occurred with virtually all immigrant groups to Canada. Of interest is that this is further proof of the changing nature of culture itself, adapting to new social conditions, moving to positions that are less in conflict with the dominant ideology of the new society it finds itself in. It is another example of the internal stress that many immigrant families must contend with as the younger generation strives to adopt western values at the cost of forsaking traditional ones. Consequently, the Vietnamese-Canadians find themselves with a new and ever-changing ethnic identity.

FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS and ETHNIC IDENTITY

I’m proud to be Native, right. But I’m also just proud to be alive.
Jason Joseph, age 18

Three of the seven First Nations students said that they feel Native people don’t encourage their children to follow their cultural traditions as much as other ethnic groups do. Yet at the same time, six of them said that they have learned much about
their culture and their people’s history from family elders. In fact, most of them learned about their clan’s place within the tribal society in this manner. More painful evidence could be seen in the response they gave after I asked this group if they knew what the residential school system was about. Every one of them quickly answered “Yes”. The same question was asked of each of the other ethnic groups in the study. Only two students, both White, knew anything about them at all!

All of the First Nations students feel that their generation has much more pride in their heritage than the previous few generations. Mary Pelletier, the oldest of the students, offered an explanation for this:

Mary: Personally, what I think is that there’s a lot more Native youth now, like people like us, who are in school, furthering their education, who are actually doing things like that self-government school down in Gastown. They’re trying to make a step forward, make a positive change... It’s really a good time to be proud of who we are. And we’re not oppressed as much anymore either. I mean, the doors are opening. And we’re actually taking chances and getting out there.

Mary gives two reasons for the increase in Native pride in recent years: less oppression and a corollary of that, more opportunities for First Nations people. Her response indicates that she has some faith in the meritocracy system similar to one of the Vietnamese participants. It also indicates the effect outside social forces have upon a culture: as the dominant western culture softens its position on the indigenous peoples, they respond by “actually taking chances and getting out there”.

Where is Mary getting the impression that Native people are “not oppressed as much anymore”? I am not certain. However, a few weeks prior to the group interview an event took place in B.C. that was the first of its kind. The B.C. government, in conjunction with both the federal government and the Nisga’a tribe of northern B.C., completed in principle an historic land claims agreement, after a couple of years of
negotiations and much media coverage. This was the first time that any government in British Columbian history had even acknowledged that there was anything to be done about the land claims at all. It is significant that six of the seven Native students knew a lot about the deal. It may be indicative of why there is a sense that White oppression of Native people isn’t as harsh as it once was.

All of the First Nations students expressed intense emotion over the reality that there are a disproportionate number of Native people living down-and-out lives on the streets. Each one of them has had to come to terms with this in order to develop a sense of pride in their heritage. Angel and her sister, Mary, explained how they see the situation in these terms:

Angel: ...Sometimes people can’t help it because they don’t have anything else. And then it’s what society forces them to do. Over the years we’re just looked at a certain way. And some people are going to keep it that way and try their best just to keep us that way.

Mary: That’s right. I mean, if you’re gonna stand up and speak for yourself that’s different. But some people really don’t have the self-esteem to do that. I mean, it took me a long time to actually realize, you know, that I can actually do something and be proud of who I am....But some people don’t know how to make that change. I’m living in an area now where I see people, Native people, on the street. And I think to myself, “That could be me any day”...So I do my best not to judge them. They have their reasons for being there.

Angel’s reflections indicate an acute awareness of how systemic racism is still working against First Nations people. (This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). They are also a clear example of how ethnicity and social class intersect in the formation of a person’s identity. Her older sister, Mary, who graduated from Spectrum the previous year and has been steadily employed since, speaks of the need for self-esteem before pride in one’s Native heritage can develop to overcome
the obstacles that seem to keep some people down. Both Pelletier sisters, and their
cousin Melanie, mentioned several times that it is much easier for a person to have
high self-esteem if they come from a strong family, which they consider themselves
fortunate enough to have.

All of the First Nations participants were quick to say that their people have had to
suffer more racism than any other minority. This assertion lead to the following insight
into how some Native people perceive themselves:

Melanie: ...We just understand racism, right. It's just that we have a long history with it.

Mary: We Native people are not greedy people. We know it's not our land. We are just
caretakers of the land....Lots of people from all over the world were going to
eventually come here. I just wish it could have happened in a better way, you know.
All of us wish that, right? [Many of the others say, "Yeah"]. We can't change that.
...I think we're just...I just see us as very humble people.

Silence befell the group when Mary finished speaking. It seemed as though each
of them had gone into some serious reflections about what it meant to be a person of
First Nations heritage. I did not continue this line of questioning any further.

From Mary's comments we can ascertain that at least some Native people see
themselves just as she suggested: as not greedy (compared to other people,
presumably White) and as very humble. Both characteristics may indeed be more true
of Native people in general than of other people. But one thing is certain: to accept
these traits as part of the overall make-up of First Nations culture(s) is to help
understand how the present-day situation came to be. It provides context, both in the
historical sense and the spiritual. Mary contends that Native people understand that
they were only to be "caretakers of the land" and that they couldn't own it. Many
anthropologists have found that this very aspect of Native spirituality was a very
important factor in the way contact with the Europeans was played out (Morrison and Wilson, 1986). An understanding of this may help the First Nations youth come to grips with the pain their people have had to suffer. This may have the effect of increased self-esteem and pride in their heritage.

Perhaps we can infer other aspects of First Nations identity formation from the preceding comments. By describing her people as “not greedy”, Mary implies the converse, that is, that Native people are inherently generous. The group’s desire that contact with Native people with “people from all over the world” could have happened in a “better way” implies that much suffering has occurred as a result of this contact. It may also be the case that some Native people see themselves as able to forgive others for the suffering they have had to endure. Two months after the group interview I asked Mary if this analysis was correct. She concurred, as shown by her response:

Mary: Well, I know that many Native people are still angry with White people for what happened. I mean, who can blame them? But for me, I just feel we have to get on with it and make the best of it. I mean, forgive, maybe, but don’t forget. It’s too hard to forget.

All of the students said that they found it difficult to feel pride in their Native heritage in elementary school. Indeed, four of them said they were forced to consider themselves as Native and therefore “different” from other students because of racist taunts they received in the school yard. Apparently, this was especially the case in northern B.C. (Six of them did at least part of their elementary schooling there). Although their collective experience in being a First Nations person was a little easier once they made it to the regular high school, most of them found confidence in who they were once they entered one of Vancouver’s junior alternative programs for Native youth. In fact, all four of the ones who went through these programs expressed this
sentiment. They felt that these programs were instrumental in helping them feel a sense of pride in their First Nations heritage.

One of the two males, Leonard Lewis, a member of the Haida Nation, described a poignant experience he went through that made him aware of his Native background.

Leonard: ...Before I wasn't really myself. I don't think. I was trying to act like all these other kinds of people, mostly White people. But then...I lost, like, a lot of stuff in my life.

PO: Do you mind explaining what you mean by "you lost a lot of stuff in your life"?

Leonard: Well, I lost, like, a lot of friends. I lost my ex-girlfriend...Because I wasn't who I was.

PO: What do you mean by that?

Leonard: I was trying to act like someone else which I wasn't. So I wasn't acting like myself. But now, now I know who I am and stuff like that. I know...Indian stuff, so...I don't mind no more. I'm proud of being Indian.

Although I decided not to pursue what it was exactly that Leonard went through because it seemed to be a very painful memory for him, I can only assume he was leading a lifestyle that wasn't healthy. During the semester that the interviews took place Leonard took a week from school at Spectrum to participate in a leadership program for Native youth. He loved the experience and when it was over found himself at an even higher level of pride in his heritage. Both he and the other Native fellow involved with this project, Jason Joseph, are very athletic youths. Both of them said with obvious joy that they have great times playing in the All-Native basketball tournaments that occur throughout the province.

However, there appears to be an intricate construction of masculinity within First Nations culture that defies easy analysis. Both Leonard and Jason said that they have
trouble getting along with other Native guys. When I asked about their own obvious friendship, Jason responded with, "We've got this bond together. We've got this basketball thing, that's all." And Leonard agreed. Their contention is that if it weren't for certain things they have in common such as a passion and talent for athleticism, they would not be close friends. Further, they would not be friends with any Native fellows that they did not have these commonalities with, that they did not respect. In fact, both of these fellows spoke of the notion of "respect" with an obvious zeal that I can only speculate has something to do with their own cultural construction of masculinity. On the other hand, the female students do not feel the same confusion in their relationships with other First Nations females. Four of the five females have only First Nations female friends. I am uncertain if these are common arrangements within their cultures.

If Mary Pelletier's opinion of gender relations is any indication of the norm within First Nations culture, the social construction of femininity appears to be undergoing some changes, as well. I had asked Mary how she pictured her life ten years into the future. Her response, here in part, serves to at least partially illuminate these changes:

Mary: It doesn't matter to me if the guy I marry is Native. All of my long-term relationships have been with Natives. But I'm never gonna put a picture in my head of the face of the guy I may one day marry. It's just who I fall for...I do plan to have children one day. And I'm gonna do my best for my future and the future of my children. Because, you know, it could very well be that I will end up being single. And that's okay. It's better than okay! I know lots of single moms and their kids are great! It all depends on how you feel about yourself; that's how you'll raise your child...My mom's a good Native person, you know, who raised us pretty much by herself. And she's very proud of who she is. And so are we. So it didn't matter because my dad wasn't there....I think I'll do a perfect job on my own. And I'll make sure my baby is damn proud of who he or she is!

Mary's comments indicate that, in her opinion, there are shifting gender roles within
her culture. She appears to be feeling great pride in her womanhood, even to the point of intimating that males are almost superfluous to the process of raising a family. Mary has been most likely strongly influenced in this regard by her mother, whom I have met and perceived to be a very proud and strong woman. However, Mary may also be more of an anomaly, an example of a different social construction of femininity within particular circles of First Nations culture, one that is willing to take all responsibility and power in the raising of the next generation. None of the other Native female participants spoke of sole parenthood as something they envisioned in their future. Since she had graduated from Spectrum the previous year, it seemed that aspects of feminism such as female independence had influenced her thinking, at least to some degree.

In summary, although the ethnic identity that my First Nations students articulated has been fraught with complexities, often difficult ones, one thing is certain. All of the programs that they have been part of, either academic, athletic or social, that are geared solely for First Nations people have been beneficial in giving each of them a higher level of self-esteem and pride in being a person of First Nations heritage.

THE WHITE STUDENTS and ETHNIC IDENTITY

I lived in Maple Ridge when I was in elementary school and there wasn't any. It hadn't gotten out there yet. You know, like different races. It's mainly White people out there. But in grade 8 I went to Waterford (Secondary in east Vancouver). I noticed a big change. Everyone I saw walking down the hall was, like, a lot of different races besides White...I was shocked!

Diane Thibault, age 17

The above quote fairly accurately encapsulates the initial experience all five of the White participants described of the first time they realized they were White and actually had an ethnicity or race. It did not occur the first day of kindergarten as it did for most of the Chinese and Vietnamese students. Four of the five said that they first considered
themselves to be a White person upon entering the big high schools of east Vancouver and seeing so many peers who were not from European stock. (The fifth student came to Spectrum directly from a predominantly White high school in the Okanagan Valley). Even though most of them acknowledged that there were a number of non-White people in their elementary schools, for some reason the distinctions became more acute within the large populations of the regular high schools. Perhaps the following comment from Patrick Bouchard provides some insight:

Patrick: I think I first realized I was White when I got to high school and saw, you know, people were going into their separate groups. And I saw that you weren’t really accepted because you’re not East Indian or something like that.

Patrick’s description corroborates what the Chinese students described. Through a complex set of social forces, grade 8 students find themselves developing friendships with other students of their own “race”. An underlying motivator for this may be an individual’s search for a social atmosphere that feels comfortable enough to help them get over the shock of entering a school of close to two thousand students after the experience of the comparatively small elementary school. It appears that this pattern is maintained throughout all of the high school years.

Leslie Roman points out that quite often White culture is treated like the hidden norm in our society and that this implies “that whites are colourless, and hence without racial subjectivities, interests and privileges” (Roman, 1993, p. 71). Nancy Wong, one of the Chinese students, agreed with this view:

Nancy: It bugs me that Caucasian people think they are normal and everybody else is not. Everybody else is from some group like Chinese, or East Indian, or something. But not Caucasians. I don’t like it!... This should change.
The implications of this are clear. It is easier for White hegemony to remain hidden and go unchallenged if White people can be considered “colourless” and “normal”. The opening quote for this section also demonstrates this point. White identity is created out of a comparison to others. It was difficult for me to find a quote out of all of the transcripts with the White students that actually indicates something about the culture that my White students live within. Their comments on ethnic identity were all directed toward other groups (mostly Chinese).

The interviews for this study were clear in demonstrating that, at least today in east Vancouver, many White students are made aware early in their high school experience that they do indeed have a skin colour. The reaction to this awareness is no different than what we have seen in several parts of the U.S. in recent years: the end of affirmative action programs in California, the almost successful bid by former Ku Klux Klan member David Duke to become a U.S. Senator, to name but a few. Leslie Roman calls this position “white defensiveness”, which encompasses a complex range of racist discourses that have the intention to make others believe that White people are also the oppressed subjects of racism (Roman, 1993, p. 71). And what’s more, particularly in the perception of the working-class White youth, their skin colour has in no way entitled them to any privilege whatsoever. In the opinion of the White participants for this study, privilege is considered only in material terms, with a secure future far removed from poverty through decent paying employment. They don’t feel they have this kind of privilege, yet somehow feel entitled to this because of their white skin. This should not be surprising, considering that they were raised by a generation that never had to consider either their ethnicity or a challenge to their membership in belonging to what they thought of as the elite group. In fact, excluding the mother of Patrick Bouchard, who was once married to a First Nations man, all of their parents
only have White friends. The reaction to all of this is predictable yet dangerous, particularly in their ethnic identity construction: all except one have friends that adhere to a “White people first” philosophy. This will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

The rapidly changing demographics of B.C.’s Lower Mainland, particularly in east Vancouver, have altered many White people’s construction of their own identities. They no longer consider themselves members of the elite group. It is this sense that their social location is shifting in the relational positionalities of Lower Mainland society, which is itself shifting. For instance, White people, especially White men, have considered themselves to be at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy in all western industrialized societies. Non-European people were thought to be inferior from an essentialist perspective. The Whites were used to having more power, economically, politically and socially, in comparison to all other people in B.C. for several decades now. However, recent immigrants from Asia, and particularly from the wealthy strata of Hong Kong society, are forcing some fluidity in this relationship. Now many White people sometimes find themselves in a lower socioeconomic position when compared to, say, a highly successful Asian business person. This “demotion” most likely results in an unnerving feeling, one that manifests itself in increasing animosity toward the one visible group that they perceive as responsible for this shift. This holds in particular for the working class, especially from the non-unionized or unemployed sector, during these times when the corporate agenda has been placed at the helm of the mainstream. This will be looked at in detail in the chapter on social class.

THE INDO-CANADIAN STUDENTS and ETHNIC IDENTITIES

You get your marching order from [Sikh leaders] because it’s a very hierarchical system, more hierarchical than ours is, because our society, you know, at least we tend to play this facade that we’re all equal and we
all ought to be free, we’re individuals, we present ourselves as individuals.
But in their society it’s considerably different.

Reform party’s chief B.C. organizer George Rigaux,
(Mulgrew and Rinehart, Vancouver Sun, April 22, 1997, p. A1)

The above quote, which appeared in Vancouver’s largest daily newspaper only
days prior to the federal election campaign, was taken from an article that outlined the
frustration a Reform party organizer had with the Sikh community. He felt that the Sikh
community didn’t care enough about political party ideology as much as it did about
being represented by a member of the Sikh community for their Lower Mainland riding
in Canada’s House of Commons. Mr. Rigaux’s stereotyping and unsophisticated use
of the media aside, there is something in his comments that we can learn something
from. This man did not understand the strength of ethnic identity among this particular
community in the Lower Mainland. In short, he failed to see that for many people in the
Sikh community, ethnicity supercedes political ideology. Compare the Reform party
organizer’s words with the exchange I had with Herb Kullar, a Sikh student, during the
group interview:

PO: All of you have said that nothing has ever been taught or even mentioned about
your culture in the classroom. And therefore none of the other students get to learn
anything about your culture in school either. How does this make you feel? Is it
acceptable to you?

Herb: I think that it can’t be stopped. People are gonna concentrate on like the majority
like say the Christians. They’ll concentrate more on them because there’s more of
them than us...I mean like the only reason for it to change would be like if there
were Brown people in the government.

Herb’s notion of ethnic representation in government to strengthen the ethnic
identity in society is not new in Canada, or elsewhere presumably. It also indicates the
degree to which B.C.’s Indo-Canadian community see themselves as Indian, and the
subsequent strategy at least some of them hope to employ to further position themselves within Canadian culture. Indeed, when Liberal MP Herb Dhaliwal recently became the first Indian "appointed to a federal-cabinet-type position in all of North America", the Vancouver Indo-Canadian community rejoiced, calling it "a milestone" and "a big breakthrough" (Rinehart and O’Neil, *Vancouver Sun*, June 12, 1997, p. A1). Understandably, they assume that if their culture is celebrated and known throughout non-Indian communities as well, their own status will rise. And what better way to accomplish this than through curriculum via the will of politicians, as Herb suggests.

The difficulty in discussing the ethnic identities of people is magnified in the context of the Indo-Canadian students at Spectrum, or even the Indo-Canadian community of east Vancouver. Most importantly, the "community" is actually a group of communities, connected only by Indian ancestry, separated by both religion and geographical paths. The six Indo-Canadian students at Spectrum who participated in the study came from three different religious groups: Sikhs, Hindus and Moslems. Moreover, the two Hindu students both came from families that had spent at least one generation in Fiji before immigrating to B.C. Yet no matter what religious affiliation their family had, all six students were intensely proud of their Indian heritage. During the group interview, strong emotions were evident surrounding the issue of culture in the social studies curriculum. Each one of them claimed to have never heard a teacher talk about Indian culture or even an Indian person in school (Gandhi notwithstanding). They all wanted the Eurocentric curriculum changed. Sandy Yusuf, the only Moslem, put it this way:

Sandy: I think [curriculum] is gonna change. And soon. Like one day Asians are gonna outnumber White people in Vancouver....The Asians are gonna want to have their cultures taught more in the school than the British and the other European stuff.
Indeed, Mandy Bhatti, a Sikh female, explained that her parents have sent both her younger brother and sister to a private school for Sikhs precisely to learn about their Sikh culture and strengthen their Sikh identity. And although Mandy herself noticed that her peers during her early elementary school years were of different ethnic backgrounds, she didn’t consider herself to be Indian until around age twelve when her parents began teaching her about their culture. She wasn’t alone as a student of these teachings as the following exchange from the group interview shows:

Herb: It’s pretty interesting, the history that my parents have taught us.

PO: I find it interesting that each one of you have had your parents teach you aspects of your culture and heritage. Is it a formal sort of thing where your parents say, “Come on over here now. It’s time for your lesson on our culture.”?

Herb: No. It’s just that they’ll tell ya whenever they can.

Baljinder: Say you’re just sitting around with nothing to do. They’ll tell you a story about things in India.

Herb: Yeah. As soon as they tell you, you know, it’s like hearing a story from an old grandpa. It’s stories like those. They’re kind of like interesting, telling you like what happened a long time ago.

Ronnie: You find yourself asking lots of questions.

Mandy: Our people had a parade, right. We had a parade. And we had to know about it first. We had to learn about why we have this parade.

Both the Hindu students and the Sikhs appeared delighted to talk about their cultures, from arranged marriages to their ancient hierarchical caste systems. Sandy, the Moslem female, either did not have these traditional stories told to her or did not wish to speak about them. The other five, however, were repeatedly told to “respect your caste” by their parents, but it seems to be less important for the younger
generation (at this point in their lives, at least). All three Sikh students were also brought to their temples to hear other elders speak of their traditions during this same time, the later elementary years. This exchange carried on to illuminate another important aspect of Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community.

PO: Was this parade in Vancouver?

Herb: Yeah. It just happened.

Baljinder: All the Indo-Canadians were walking from Marine down to Main.

Ronnie: Yeah, it’s “loois” for the Sikhs, “demali” for the Hindu, and “mead” for the Moslems.

PO: So you know the name for all three religions, Reg. That’s good.

Sandy: (chuckling) We all associate a lot. Of course we know about each other.

It is evident that all three groups have a connection that they recognize as people of Indian descent. Each one of them knows something of the other major Indian religions: Sikh, Hinduism and Islam. In fact, the term my students use to describe all of them is “Brown people”. During the individual interview Mandy said that Hispanic people are also considered to be Brown people, but this may represent her own individual desire to open up the group she is part of because the other students refused to accept this. The others clearly stated that only people who have ancestry in India are included in this category.

In terms of friendship, five of the six students said they felt more comfortable with other Indians in elementary school, although this has dissipated somewhat as they got older. Three of them have White friends today, although they felt adjustments had to be made in order to be accepted by their European peers.
Ronnie: You have to change your ways a little to fit in with them.

PO: How so?

Ronnie: Um. You'd have to like stop talking about your culture like. Like I've tried to talk about my culture and the White guys just, you know, make jokes. I don't take it personal, right. It's just that they're not interested in it, right. So now I don't try to talk about it.

Baljinder: It's no different than us not being interested in hearing them talk about their god, and praising their god.

Ronnie: Yeah. Exactly. I wouldn't like get into Jesus like. I'm just not there. I'm not from that.

The issue of how to generate cross-cultural interest is one that curriculum reform should address in order to facilitate mutual understanding and a more tolerant society. Baljit explained that not all non-Indian people are close-minded about other cultures:

Mandy: If they're curious, they can ask. They do if they're curious.

PO: Do you find the occasional person asking about your culture?

Mandy: Yes. Some people do if they're curious. But most of them ask about...Most White people asking you about your culture ask you how you get married and your weddings...all these things. That's what they're mostly curious about.

Herb: They usually like coming to the weddings. the East Indian parties.

Mandy: They like our clothes.

The students continued to engage in detailed descriptions of arranged marriages, the weddings and "hall parties" with an apparent sense of pride and excitement. I couldn't help but feel that the people of the Lower Mainland are very fortunate to have such vibrant communities within the whole. However, sometimes small conflicts can
escalate to a level that indicates ethnic tensions cannot be ignored. In the large high schools, whenever one of them felt threatened, they always went to other Indians for protection. All of them spoke of the highly-charged atmosphere between the Indo-Canadians and the Chinese at Johnston Secondary, one of the big east end high schools, that three of them used to attend prior to coming to Spectrum. Apparently, this is common knowledge among the Indian youth, for all six of them were aware of the situation at Johnston.

It is obvious that the Indo-Canadian participants are proud of their heritage. There is no doubt that they feel a common bond, a common experience, with each other despite the different religious backgrounds. Apparently, their parents’ friendships are almost always within their own religion and even within their own caste. This is not the only difference between these two generations, as the following comment indicates:

Sandy: I’m going to be honest. Like . . . Asians. . . . They are forced by their parents and their cultural tradition to work hard at school to learn the stuff. Like, that’s the way their culture is. People from Asia. So like when they come here it’s easier for them to get a job because we’re not really taught to work hard as much as they are. We’re not taught how important it is to get an ‘A’ in math.

Sandy’s comments indicate many insights into her own identity, not the least of which is the distancing of her social location from the category “Asian”. She considers herself to be a Canadian first, Indian second. Interestingly, Sandy has bought into the “myth of the model minority” which purports that Asian immigrant families have children that excel in academics compared to all others. This stereotype is problematic on several levels, but here I would like to point out that research shows that students of Asian backgrounds who were born and raised in Canada tend to do better than the newcomers (Maclear, 1994, p. 60). In other words, it is Sandy’s own group that fares
best academically. Later on, Sandy stated her desire to shut the door on immigration, her reason being that it is making it “more difficult for us Canadians to get jobs”. The merits of this political position will be discussed later. The important point to be made here is that her own parents immigrated from India twenty years before, yet Sandy sees herself as a Canadian at a cultural disadvantage in comparison to immigrant Asian youth and their work ethic. As with the Chinese students, and even more so, it appears that the dynamic of the child of the immigrant adopting some western values exists among Vancouver’s Indo-Canadian community. Although my sample set is small, a generalization seems to be relevant here. The combination of this dynamic with the traditional values that the Indo-Canadian youth hold onto has resulted in yet another example of the everchanging nature of culture, in this case, working-class Indo-Canadian culture, Vancouver-style.

A SUMMARY

It is perhaps not a surprising revelation that many of the students described painful experiences of having to suffer racist taunts as children that lead them to form ethnic identities. It should also come as no surprise that the White students were unaware of possessing an ethnic identity until they were immersed in the multicultural setting of an east end high school. After all, White hegemony discreetly acts to maintain the hidden norms of the status quo.

However, racism is obviously not the only factor that leads to an ethnic identity. The Indo-Canadian students, the First Nations students, and one Chinese female described learning cultural values and myths from discussions with the elders in their family. Of course, to some extent all of the groups learn some of this vicariously from their parents. The immigrant cultures in the study seem to be undergoing the process
all immigrants to North America have gone through: inter-generational stress as the younger generation forsakes some of the traditional values for western ones. It follows, therefore, that each generation's ethnic identity is in a state of flux and may substantially differ from the identity of their parents. Further, the conditions for change are caused by outside forces. For example, there is a noticeable effect on some of the younger Indo-Canadians as they are immersed in western and predominantly White society in terms of leisure time versus the work ethic.

There are some notions that many of the students attribute to Canadian society. For instance, all three of the Asian groups in the study and some of the Native students believe in the idea of meritocracy, that hard work and perseverance will ultimately lead a person to a higher standard of life in the future. As a child of immigrant parents I was also lead to believe in this idea. However, today's Canada appears to be very different from the one in which I grew up. There is little doubt that most of the White students in the study are apprehensive about the merits of meritocracy, to say the least.

Two things are certain about this discussion on ethnic identity. First, all of the students are very aware of their own ethnic group or race. Secondly, there is ample evidence that these identities are dynamic, responding and reacting as their social environment changes. And this is where there is hope that a more racially tolerant society can develop out of all this. The conditions must change, and in order for them to change, awareness of the Other must be increased. The reified notion of culture should be discarded by everyone. Those concerned with attempts to return Canadian society to the way it once was should also abandon this idea. It will always be a new and unique Canadian society, one that has never been seen before.
Racism, like sexism, is an ideology. Racist ideologies, as rationalizations for various forms of social, political, and economic control, have contributed to the maintenance of minority groups in social positions of inferiority.

M. Ibrahim Alladin, 1996, p. ix

In the section entitled “Analytical Framework” in chapter 3, I have given descriptions of the two models that have helped inform my analysis of ethnic relations and racist attitudes among the participants in this research. Ruth Frankenberg found that all racial discourse in the U.S. can be placed in at least one of three categories: essentialist, colour-blind/power-blind, and race cognizance (Frankenberg, 1993). Frankenberg’s model was helpful to me in making it easier to separate or group together the students’ narratives on racial or ethnic matters. It is my intention that by using Frankenberg’s taxonomy to categorize these narratives, curriculum developers may have better insight as to how best to apply anti-racist teaching strategies.

To separate the forms of racism and racist attitudes that the participants described, I used a model developed by Elliott and Flera (1993, pp. 57-69). The five forms of racism they identify are: redneck, polite, systemic, new, and institutional. This model was useful in demonstrating to me what it is that constitutes racism in the minds of the participants. Furthermore, it allowed me to see gaps in their knowledge of social relations, particularly in a historical sense, so that curriculum developers will have more to guide them as they attempt to address racism in B.C.

For the twenty-five students in the study, the predominant form of racism that they recognized is what I refer to as redneck racism. The exception to this was from the First
Nations students, who were able to perceive, although not as able or perhaps as willing to articulate, the ways in which systemic racism has held them back. Each one of the Native youth also knew of the residential school system, a form of institutional racism that only two other students were aware of: a White male who has a First Nations stepfather and another White male who spent the first ten years of his life living in northern B.C. After a deconstruction attempt on my part during the group interview for the White students, two of them began to see how systemic racism worked against the needs of both First Nations people and African Americans. One Chinese female pointed out that Canadians are more likely to display polite racism than Americans. Another had recognized that the Eurocentric perspective is often thought of as the normal perspective by White people.

EXPERIENCES AS VICTIMS OF RACISM

In this section I will be discussing racist incidents and forms of racism that the students discussed in the transcripts. I will not examine the ways that racism is directed at their respective ethnic groups that they are not aware of. After all, this study is primarily concerned with the perceptions of the working-class youth involving ethnicity and social class.

THE CHINESE STUDENTS

Just not so long ago, I was at this Italian shoe repair place and this guy, right, he told me to get out and take my shoes to this Chinese guy on First Avenue. I didn't know if he was too busy or what. ...But I was angry because he didn't have to say it like that. He was really rude the way he said it.

David Yu, age 18
I know this Chinese lady who walked into this store for clothes, like clothes for women. And everybody in there was White. And all heads would turn to look at her because she's really, like, really a sophisticated lady. And when she asked for help all the girls who worked there looked away. They wouldn't help her... Don't they know that they'll never have as much money as she has?

Jennifer Tran, age 19

All of the Chinese students felt that White people, even their White “friends”, look down upon Chinese people. All five of them said that they are aware of racist attitudes from White people every day. Moreover, they claimed during the group interview that every Chinese person in Vancouver must contend with this on a regular basis. In fact, Vancouver’s largest Chinese-language daily newspaper, *Ming Pao*, reported the results from a telephone poll of Chinese-Canadians they conducted: 95% said that some Caucasians are racist toward Chinese people and 60% said that they have been discriminated against (Cernetig, *Globe & Mail*, September 30, 1995, p. D2).

There were several descriptions of racism my Chinese participants have had to endure from White people, often perceived to be Italians, and a few descriptions of drunk Native people using racist names when addressing them. The incidents with White people range from having eggs and insults hurled at them from passing cars to having a bus driver stop the bus and demand a passenger who was calling one of the female students racist names to get off the bus at once. The student, Nancy Wong, was extremely grateful to the bus driver for his assistance in stopping the insulting and humiliating experience.

All of them said in the individual interviews that racism toward Chinese people is for the most part the result of the perception that immigrants are taking jobs away from White people. When I brought this up during the group interview, Jennifer Tran, the oldest at age nineteen, expressed some frustration over this:
Jennifer: I mean like Hong Kong and Taiwan and um Singapore. A lot of people are bringing their business here. And um, remember for a while there was this thing in the west end where there were people writing “Chinks go home”? Do you remember that on the news?

PO: Yes, I do.

Jennifer: It’s just gonna get worse because... there are some people that don’t think of the good ways... of bringing in another culture... They don’t think about like, that Vancouver is getting richer. Like it’s becoming a better city.

PO: Do you mean richer because of the greater diversity of people?

Jennifer: Exactly. And instead of that they are just thinking, “Oh, they are coming here to take all our jobs”. But they don’t realize that they are bringing more jobs here. That guy who is a millionaire, he’s opening up a hotel here. And he’s providing jobs, you know. White people don’t think about it that way but it’s true.

The important point to be made here is that all of the Chinese students agreed with Jennifer’s point: White people fear that Chinese immigrants are “stealing” jobs here when they feel the reverse is true; Chinese immigration is creating more jobs here. It was at this point in the interview when Nancy Wong made reference to the idea that perhaps some of the immigrants are coming to Canada with their own set of racist assumptions.

Nancy: I think some Caucasians are racist to us because maybe some of the people coming here are racist, too. I mean we may not be because we are used to lots of cultures. But what if they are racist? Then it’s only gonna get worse.

The chicken-and-the-egg argument put forth by Nancy is interesting because it was the only reference made by any of the Chinese students that there are some Chinese people who are racist toward White people. It also indicates the complex dynamic that surrounds and interweaves throughout the ideology of racism. Certainly it
demonstrates that the whole issue of immigration is much more than it appears to be on the surface.

For the most part, the only type of racism that the Chinese students were able to see was redneck racism. Not one of the students was aware of any institutional racism against Chinese-Canadians. For instance, the enactment of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923 forbade Chinese people from immigrating to Canada (Stanley, 1990, p.146). This lead me to wonder just how much intermingling is occurring between recent Chinese immigrants and those who have been here for several generations. By the students’ accounts, very little if any actually does occur.

However, once I described other types of racism, Jennifer Tran began to describe examples of polite racism she had experienced. Following all of the interviews, Jennifer began engaging in conversations with me around the topic of traditional Chinese values and western values and why there may be clashes. She was intimating that a form of new racism may be developing. Jenny Kwan, one of the first two Chinese-Canadians to be elected to the B.C. Legislature, concurred with Jennifer on one major point: Chinese people put a lot of value on hard work and less emphasis on leisure. Western society, particularly seen in North American popular culture, seems to have its emphasis on hard work versus leisure time reversed from the traditional Chinese position (Jenny Kwan, personal communication, August 7, 1996).

THE VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

I have never had a White person come up to me and, you know, say all these racist things to me and make me feel bad about myself. Nope. Basically, only Chinese people do that to me.... In my personal view, I think Vietnamese and Chinese are the same. But Chinese people think they are better than Vietnamese.... You can tell by the way they talk and their attitude toward us.

Rose Chuong, age 18
The above quote demonstrates that Vietnamese people are all too aware that they are considered at the bottom of the "Oriental" hierarchy. Rose felt quite certain that the Chinese superiority complex toward Vietnamese people is based on perceptions of wealth. After all, Rose stated, "Everything for Orientals, especially for Vietnamese and Chinese, is that money is the key".

However, one of the two Vietnamese girls, Thao Hoang, said that racism is on the decline in Vancouver. She was the only student in the entire study to take this position. She said that all ethnic groups make negative comments about other groups, and that there already is too much focus on racism in our schools and in our society and "nothing ever changes so let's just drop the subject". However, she also pointed out that schools generally present this as a White/Native issue or a White/Black issue and she's tired of this. Thao feels it's time to learn about Asian people in school, too.

Thao's overall position that racism is decreasing in Vancouver in the face of constant evidence to the contrary is tenuous at best and one has to wonder why she said that. It is noteworthy that she took a similarly conservative position regarding gender concerns. Speculation leads me to the conclusion that she simply doesn't want to be seen as one who is complaining. Thao may be grateful simply to be living in Canada and holds to the strategy of accepting the dominant ideology to make it easier for her here. Nevertheless, her contention that the school curriculum is racist by its omission of Asian issues is valid and one that I will take up in a later chapter.

Rose Chuong has a completely different take on the issue of racism, as indicated by the opening quote of this section. She spoke at length about the superior attitude that Chinese people, especially those from mainland China, have toward the Vietnamese. (The Chinese students concurred with Rose's argument.) It appears that these hierarchies of social relations among people of Asian descent are longstanding and have very little to do with events in Canada and mostly arise from the traditional Asian
cultures themselves.

Rose also attempted to understand White anxiety and racism toward "Oriental" people, as she put it.

Rose: [White people] must feel threatened. They feel this is their territory. You know. They feel threatened when a lot of Chinese and Vietnamese, Filipinos, whatever, come here. They feel threatened cuz like we're taking over their territory and their jobs, you know. I see it.

I asked Rose how she came to the opinion that White people feel threatened by immigration from Asia. Had she herself heard White people express these fears? Once again, she reiterated that she has never been "hassled" by any White people, but that she has heard other people, both White and non-White, say that this is the case. In considering the absence of racism from White people, I can only conclude that this is either true or she has never been made aware of any racist acts directed toward her. Most likely, however, she feels similar to Thao and may simply not wish to be seen as complaining about the country that helped her get away from the difficult situation her family was in in Vietnam. After all, it appears that the Vietnamese culture has borne the brunt of much racism at the hands of other Asian peoples and that this has been the situation long before any of them came to Canada.

THE FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

[British Columbians'] worst quality is racism. From about 200 years ago, Europeans developed toward the First Peoples of the province a contempt that all but dehumanized them. The consequences were dreadful, yet we still get irritated whenever B.C. Natives show something besides conciliatory passivity. Bruce Serafin, Vancouver Sun, December 21, 1996, p. D2

...I think a lot of people become ignorant toward us because of Native status: our
medical is paid for and so is our tuition. And they think that everything is okay
and wonder why we want more. They don’t understand the whole situation.
Mary Pelletier, age 19

All of the interviews with the First Nations students corroborated the attitude toward
their people alluded to in the quote from the Vancouver Sun newspaper and the one
from Mary. All seven of them were unanimous and quick to agree with the assertion
one of them made that their people have had to endure more racism than any other
ethnic group. All of them have lived at least part of their lives in rural B.C., all but one in
the north. And all of them felt that racism toward Natives was much worse outside of
the city, including from school teachers.

Melanie: ...Whenever they taught the [Native/White] history in socials, the Natives were
just told this is how it is from how the Europeans saw it.

Mary: They don’t get into it up north....The schools down here [in Vancouver] are very
different from up north because it’s all one way up there and it won’t ever change.

Angel: No compassion. No nothing.

PO: That must have been tough for you to listen to.

(silence.....)

The effect of the racist curriculum and teachers up north upon these students is
predictable. All of them did not like their school experience in rural B.C., often to the
point of wanting to quit. The narratives of the First Nations students are clear in what
type of racist discourse they have had to endure from White people, particularly in the
were replete with details of being told they are “lazy”, “inferior” and “second-class
citizens”, and even included an anecdote about a northern town where many White
people "won't even touch a Native". The Native students described having had to endure overt, or redneck, racism and the covert, or polite, racism. However, they were also aware of systemic racism: Mary Pelletier spoke of how Native people are always rushed by bar staff at closing time to finish their drinks and get out each night, while White patrons can "relax to finish their drinks".

But obviously, racism against people of First Nations background is not relegated to rural B.C. One of the students in the study discussed a project at a junior alternative program for First Nations students at Victoria Park Secondary School in east Vancouver in which students and staff in the program undertook to carve a fifty-foot cedar log into an intricate totem pole of a "distinctive Haida design". The totem pole was twice vandalized: once while it was still in the school workshop area and another time after it was placed on the school's front grounds. Leonard Lewis, one of the student carvers who also participated in this project, spoke of the pain he felt after the attacks. A publication put out by the B.C. School Trustees Association described similar feelings that many of the other Native students involved with the project had to deal with, likening it to a metaphor for much of their lives: overcoming devastation and adversity to learn perseverance and wisdom (Gray-Grant, Education Leader, Nov. 10, 1995, p. 3).

The students offered many reasons as to why there is so much racism against Native people, whether in the city or in the country: the biased media coverage of the land claims negotiations, a perception that Natives are always demanding more, they don't pay taxes, and so on. Jason Joseph put it in terms of an intersection between ethnicity and social class:

Jason: I think it's more because there are more poor Native people in east Vancouver and that's what people judge them from...because they are so poor and there are lots of them. And all the stuff that happens, like drugs and alcohol, they get
PO: Why do you think so many Native people who live in east Vancouver or the downtown eastside are poor?

Jason: Well, they don't come from a rich background. They come from reserves. They come to the city and you gotta make money to live here. And you can't always find work, right. And some get introduced to drugs and all this other stuff. So they turn to crime. And then they get into trouble and then you get labelled. And then you just go down the gutter from there.

Jason's analysis indicates at least a partial awareness of how systemic racism works to keep Native people down. Some of the Native people on the reserves are poor and come to the city to try and better their situation only to find that employment is difficult to secure. The use of drugs can ease the pain, but this only leads to further troubles. At another stage in the interviews Jason discussed how a deeply troubled childhood can "break a person's spirit" and lead them to a life of drugs. Again, Jason hinted several times of some awareness of systemic racism that makes it extremely difficult for many Native people to break the cycle of abuse and despair.

All of the First Nations students cited several examples of redneck racism they have had to endure in the city, primarily from White people. In fact, Melanie Felix, who moved to Vancouver only nine months prior to the individual interview, recalled five racist incidents she has suffered here, all from White males. Twice she has been waiting at a bus stop with her two aunts when young men stop their car and hurl racist insults at them. There is no question that many of my Native students have had to endure extremely humiliating and degrading experiences throughout their lives. Very disappointing to me is the revelation that almost all of them disclosed that they occasionally have had White teachers who are racist toward Native students in the city, both in elementary school and at the high school level. Often, the perceived
racism may be in the form of sympathy, followed by streaming a First Nations student into a modified program.

Mary: I had a lot of teachers there [at Victoria Park] who felt sorry for me because they thought I was poor....And I really didn’t like it. I didn’t like the way...well, they didn’t treat me badly, but they treated me differently from everybody else...I sat in the back and never said anything. I kept to myself and I didn’t get my work done. So that’s why they put me in modified...They didn’t give me a chance; they didn’t want to get to know me. They just felt sorry for me....They thought I was stupid and slow; they didn’t want to deal with me. So they just threw me down below. [Note: Mary’s modified classes were in the basement at Victoria Park.]

Mary’s comments explain how well-intentioned teachers can still play into the dynamics of systemic racism and inadvertently work toward maintaining the current hegemony of White domination of Native people. To be fair, teachers in the regular classes have upwards to thirty-two students in each of their classes and simply don’t have the time to work one-on-one with each student to set up a structured work and study schedule for them at home. This is but one effect from the current situation regarding cutbacks to public education funding in B.C., as well as elsewhere. Nevertheless, economic concerns often have the deleterious effect of further marginalizing those groups who have already felt the effects of oppression in one form or another.

Both of the two male students spoke of racism from Chinese males, primarily around sports. Indeed, Leonard said that the “hatred” he felt from a Chinese teammate on the Victoria Park basketball team resulted in him quitting. Talking to the coach apparently didn’t help the situation. Leonard also said that since his family has moved to Surrey he has had to go to the elementary school his two brothers attend to ask some “East Indian” boys to stop being racist toward his siblings. Apparently, prejudice
toward First Nations people is not only from White people. (This will be discussed further in chapter 6).

The effects of systemic racism have even turned some Native people’s attitudes against their own people, resulting in a form of “internalized colonialism” (Fanon, 1952, 1961). For example, according to Leonard, his mother claims that it is a person’s own fault if they get caught up in substance abuse and end up on the streets. By his own account, Leonard’s mother used to have a substance abuse problem, but managed to overcome this. Not surprisingly, Leonard has inherited this elitist attitude from his mother: he spoke in a condescending manner of all Native people who have drug- and alcohol-related problems. Another illustration of this occurred when Angel Pelletier attempted to articulate her understanding of why there is so much racism today against the Native people who live around a particular town up north:

*Angel: The Natives around [this town] aren’t exactly the best people around...When they come to town they go to the bars and...you know, I’ve been to Bingo over there and they’re like, like the ladies, they’re scrapping in there! Alright. This is a bingo hall, you know. Let’s get real! [She chuckles.]*

Angel is quick to point out that the Natives she is talking about are not from the reserve that her own family is from. Both her sister Mary and her cousin Melanie agreed with her account, thereby collectively negating the effects of the long history of racism that Native people have had to endure, in some places more than in others. It appears that even some of the First Nations students themselves need some help in deconstructing the current scenario involving the oppression of their peoples in B.C. Social scientists have spoken about this issue of self hatred that often develops in a people who have been colonized for a long period of time (Fanon, 1952, 1961;
THE WHITE STUDENTS

I feel myself that White people are getting pushed to the side, just like Natives did.
I feel like we’re getting pushed to the side, too. It’s all going to be like,
Chinese-dominated. I don’t like that feeling.

Diane Thibault, age 17

It was clear to me that the White students had the most difficulty describing any racism directed toward themselves. The above quote encapsulates the overall feeling I perceived that the White students in the study seem to feel discriminated against simply by having to contend with a significant number of Chinese people around them, both in the schools and on the streets. In fact, White people in B.C. have said very similar things about Chinese people throughout much of the twentieth century (Tan and Roy, 1985). Consider the following exchange during the group interview:

Diane: It’s just kind of impolite, you know, when you’re walking down the street and you got to like listen to Chinese.

Keith: Especially when they’re speaking to you, too. Especially when they like try speakin’ to you in Chinese. It’s like, “Yeah, okay buddy”. [Two of them chuckle]

PO: Do you sometimes have Chinese people speak to you in a Chinese language?

Keith, Craig: Yeah.

Patrick: Sometimes.

Keith: They don’t understand that your skin is white or something. I don’t know. And they just start speakin’ to you in Chinese.

Patrick: Canada is a multicultural country so we’ve all got to have one universal language, right?

Keith: English.
Patrick: Yeah, and everybody should be able to speak it. But I think people should be able to have their own culture, right? I mean, that's what Canada is all about.

Diane: But they should keep it in their own home. If they want to speak a different language it's...

Patrick: Well, not just in their own home but...

Diane: Well, it's better if they speak it in their own home then you don't have to...(pauses)

Keith: Hear it.

Diane: Hear it all the time, you know.

This discussion about language touches on something bigger about whose territory this belongs to. For these White working-class students, Canada belongs to White people. They may tolerate Native people, and then only some of them, and begrudgingly at that. But they resent having to share the land with people from distant places, from Asia. This resentment manifests itself by the very idea that these students feel hard done by simply by having to hear Chinese languages spoken on the streets. Much of the White urban working-class youth appear to fear having to compete with Asian youth, both academically and in the world of employment. This would explain why their racist attitudes toward Chinese people seemed much stronger than toward First Nations people. It is this competitive aspect of the relations between the Chinese and White cultures, that is behind the Whites' declaration of ownership of the streets, of what words are to be spoken. Another relevant comment offered by Diane:

Diane: ...It's really irritating the way sometimes Chinese people can get jobs quicker sometimes.

PO: Have you noticed that when you go for jobs?

Diane: Oh I've noticed that, yes.
PO: Is it a Chinese person who’s doing the hiring?
Diane: That’s what I suspect.

PO: Is it a Chinese person that interviews you?
Diane: Sometimes. Not all the time.

PO: How do you know that they have hired a Chinese person instead of you?
Diane: I don’t know. Sometimes I hear about it later. [Her tone begins to show a little indignation].

Diane’s responses are somewhat vague and indicate to me that she may be scapegoating Chinese people for her own job rejections. Her theme throughout this exchange, that Chinese people are taking away the jobs, is a common one throughout many elements of the White community in B.C. in recent years. In fact, a rather lengthy article in B.C.’s largest daily newspaper expressed this very view recently (Todd, *Vancouver Sun*, February 1, 1997; p. C3). Diane expressed similar resentment toward Chinese people when it came to academic competition.

Diane: ...I always had problems with like Orientals getting really good grades and stuff. Like when I was in grade 8, I didn’t do too good and they always got As and Bs and stuff and they’d gloat about it and sit around with their calculators all the time. [A few of the guys chuckle]. And they just made everyone…[I don’t know...ohhh...[exasperation in recalling].

It is important to bear in mind that these comments have been given during the interviews in response to questions I put forth regarding any racism they feel they have had to endure. The one White student in the study who spent a significant part of his life up north, Keith Allen, had this to say when I inquired about whether any of them felt
they enjoyed any privilege because they were White:

Keith: 'I think the Natives have more privileges than us now....They get cheques just for being Native. They don't have to pay for a fishing license. You know, they get homes built for them. All kinds of stuff.

All of the others, except for Patrick, agreed with Keith that Native people have far more privileges than they themselves have. (It is noteworthy that Patrick said on several occasions during the individual interview how much he appreciated his First Nations step-father). All of these participants were adamant that they had nothing to do with the poor treatment Native people had to endure at the hands of White colonialism and should in no way be blamed for this. One girl, Cathy Parkinson, commented that the Black people in the U.S. today should also refrain from complaining for similar reasons. As Cathy put it: "Everybody has to pull their own weight nowadays. There should be no more handouts for anybody, no matter what race you are." This position reflects a similar philosophy to those people living in California who voted to support a proposition that would effectively put an end to affirmative action programs.

It is clear that what the White students in my study see as oppression which they must endure because of their "white skin" is little more than having to contend with increased competition for academic placements and jobs, particularly from Asians. This is not a new position for British Columbia’s White working class toward Asian people: during the first two decades of this century, the increasingly militant labour groups were vehemently opposed to allowing Asians into their unions and even supported "Asiatic exclusionism" (Stanley, 1990, p. 157). There is no question that much of the working class, especially those in the trade union movement, has altered its views of "race" to a more progressive stance (Palmer, 1992, p. 410). However, the
recent downturn in the economy is having an effect on many working-class people, as well. The general trend among them is that even something as well-intentioned as affirmative action programs, that exist to address the issue of White privilege and level the playing field, are confused as blatant racism against them. To be fair, the White working class of east Vancouver are having difficulty in seeing any White privilege accruing to them. Compared to what it was in their parents’ generation this may be understandable. However, the experiences with racism the White students were able to articulate seemed to be nothing more than expressing discontent that they, the working-class component of the White population, are no longer part of society’s elite group. Somewhat mistakenly, they always assumed they were. I use the term “mistakenly” because, for the most part, the working class in Canada has had to struggle long and hard to get whatever privileges they have managed to gain (Palmer, 1992). Unfortunately, the students in this study are largely unaware of these struggles, as they are about many working-class issues.

THE INDO-CANADIAN STUDENTS

All six Indo-Canadian participants agreed that racism was a common part of their lives and was, in their opinion, increasing in Vancouver. The oldest of the Indo-Canadian students, Moe Argun, graduated from Spectrum the previous year. He put forth an interesting idea about how racist attitudes are reinforced in our society:

Moe: When people see on the news that some person with dark skin and an ethnic last
name has gotten into trouble, they start looking at all people with dark skin and
different last names like they’re bad people, too. So just because of my appearance
some people think I’m, you know, a bad person... It’s especially bad when I’m in a
mall.

This was one of the few references any of the students in the study made to ethnic
or racist stereotyping caused by the coverage the media gives certain events and the
response this creates in the general public. It shows at least some awareness on
Moe’s part of how stereotypes are manufactured and reinforced in our media-
influenced society and the effects this has on the lives of people from visible minorities
such as himself. Ronnie Prasad said that this wariness toward Indo-Canadian people
is not limited to White people:

Ronnie: Sometimes it’s like people are intimidated by me. Like if I walk into a store with a
couple of my friends they’ll be like, you know, you can see that they are treating
me different.

PO: And in general who would these people be?

Ronnie: ... Usually Orientals. They act very different around us.

PO: Can you describe how they may act different around you?

Ronnie: Yeah... They watch me all the time as I walk around their store. They, you know, 
like get nervous when I ask them something. Stuff like that.

To be fair it is most likely that most of the stores that Ronnie and his friends frequent
in east Vancouver are owned and operated by other Asian people, particularly
Chinese. What he has described is more or less how racist stereotypes and attitudes
can make day to day experiences less comfortable for people in Ronnie’s social
location: a working-class male youth from a visible minority.
All six of the Indo-Canadian students said that White people demonstrate the most racist attitudes toward them. This comes in many forms, from one fellow’s narrative of running into racist skinheads on the Granville Street mall to two other students’ descriptions of having teachers who favour White students over anyone else, to all of them having had the experience of cars driving by filled with White male youth yelling out racist slurs to them. There is also the sense that racist attitudes are behind employment rejections they experience, as Ronnie described in the opening quote. However, all of the Indo-Canadian males described a youth filled with experiences similar to what Ronnie describes here:

Ronnie: People used to make fun of me...once in a while. Like they’d tease me about my colour...Usually it was the White people who would make fun of me....

Apparently, many of the Indo-Canadian males still have to contend with similar racism today.

Ronnie: ...People usually categorize me as Fijian. Some people call me a Hindu but...

PO: Is that a bit of a slur?

Ronnie: Yeah, I see it as a bit of a slur. But it is what I am, right. I don’t like people calling me a Punjab or a Paki. That’s worse.

PO: Do you get called things like that even these days?

Ronnie: Yeah. It happens every once in a while. A White guy drives by and yells, “Ya dam Pakis!” And I get offended by that. I sort of try and laugh it off now. It’s been happening ever since, like you know, I’ve been hearing it for so long. So whatever.

These examples of blatant, overt racism obviously can depress the intended targets
about their place in Canadian society. But each of my students see these unpleasant events as isolated incidents caused by those whom they consider to be “losers”. It must be more difficult to accept when similar attitudes are detected in authority figures, albeit in a more polite form. Consider the following:

*Herb:* I've had White teachers that, you know, like favour their own kind. Right there in the class. It's obvious that they do.

*Mandy:* I've never noticed it. But I've had friends tell me about White teachers that pick on a certain race because he doesn't like them, and be nice to another race. Like, the Whites get treated better.

*PO:* Who do you hear gets picked on the most?

*Mandy:* It's usually the Punjab. Or any other race except White.

Clearly, it is the perceptions of these students that White teachers give preferential treatment to White students. My eleven years of teaching experience in the B.C. public education system leads me to speculate that there are very few teachers who consider themselves to be racist. One cannot deny, however, that there appears to be a significant number of teachers who at least treat a student differently according to the student’s ethnic background. This is how some of these Indo-Canadian students perceive the situation in the Vancouver schools.

It is also the perception of all of these students that racist attitudes and ethnic tensions are increased because of the large populations in the regular high schools of east Vancouver. This situation works to pressure people to “stick to their own kind” for reasons of comfort and, in some cases, safety. Both Baljinder and Mandy have witnessed several times how quickly and easily a simple threat between two males from different “races” can turn into a huge “race thing”. Both of them have seen this
repeatedly occur between Sikh and Chinese students at the large secondary school they previously attended. They all claimed that there was little or no racism at Spectrum because of its small student population.

SUMMARY

There is no question that each of the five groups in the study has had to contend with racism and racist attitudes throughout their lives and, for the most part, on a daily basis. However, the degree to which each group is subjected to ethnic prejudice varies incredibly between the groups. The First Nations people have had to endure a systematic long-term attack on their cultural values that has included devastating laws and assimilationist strategies that many people consider to be a plan of "cultural genocide" (Frideres, 1988, p. 22; Dickason, 1992, p. 327). Chinese people have also had to contend with institutional racism in Canada, but the Chinese and Vietnamese students, being first-generation Canadian, were unaware of these historical events. Still, perhaps because of the recent surge in their population in the Lower Mainland, the Chinese (and Vietnamese) people face much prejudice in their public social relations, particularly from White people. Apparently, the response of the majority of White people toward the Chinese has been one of hostility since the first wave of Chinese immigrants moved to B.C. to help construct the C.P. Railway line in the late nineteenth century (Stanley, 1990). The same can be said for the Indo-Canadians, but perhaps because of their smaller numbers the intense negative sentiments among certain segments of the White working class toward Chinese people is not quite the same toward them.

The First Nations students described lives filled with racist experiences, both in the city and in the smaller towns of northern B.C. They and many of the Indo-Canadians
spoke of racist attitudes they have encountered in the schools, even from teachers. It is my contention that the vast majority of teachers in the Vancouver public school system do not consider themselves to be racist. Most would be shocked to find out that many non-White students detect racist attitudes in the manner they conduct their classes. Nevertheless, these feelings among the students are real and must somehow be addressed, at least through the teaching certification programs in the universities. Perhaps this is an area where the British Columbia Teachers' Federation could increase its efforts to sensitize all its members.

Furthermore, there appears to be a tendency for many students to personalize racism and fail to see it as systemic or institutional (Kelly, 1995, pp. 109-110). This interpretation has the effect of leaving these other forms of racism unchallenged, thus maintaining the current hegemonic system. As mentioned in chapter 4, many of the Indo-Canadian students were also acutely sensitive to the omission of Indian culture from the curriculum. One of the Vietnamese females expressed this same sentiment. There is no question that Asian cultures and Asian contributions to Canadian society have to be included in a significant way in the curriculum in order to make the school site and society in general a more tolerant place. At the least, curriculum reform should address this gap to make the school experience an easier one for these students, and perhaps a more interesting one for all students.

The White working-class students' experience with racism was vague to me, seeming to originate from some sense that the presence of so many non-White people in Vancouver is in some way the reason that they feel very uneasy about their own economic prospects in the future. The White students had the most difficulty in recalling any redneck racism they had been the target of. But are there other forms of racism directed toward White people that they are not aware of? The next chapter will look at precisely this question.
CHAPTER 6
STUDENTS' RACIST ATTITUDES TOWARD OTHERS

In this chapter the primary focus will be upon the racist attitudes that appear to be prevalent within one ethnic group toward any others. The interview transcripts were, of course, the main source of information, and these were augmented, or triangulated, with observations made around the school site. I will touch upon the sources of these attitudes, in particular, referring to student accounts of how their parents regard other races or ethnic groups. It is important to mention that the views expressed in this chapter can only be looked upon with any degree of certainty as representative of only the students involved in the study. They are not to be taken as the views of all or most members who belong to a particular ethnic group here in Vancouver or elsewhere. Perhaps, however, some insight can be gleaned from these opinions and attitudes that will prove beneficial to curriculum reform with the intention of promoting a more racially tolerant society.

I must also emphasize that this chapter is primarily concerned with racist attitudes of the students. Consequently, the reader may get the wrong impression and assume that all of these adolescents have not been able to form a positive relationship with someone from another race. On the contrary, many of them have had friendships with the Other. Some of them have obvious friendships at Spectrum with peers from other ethnic groups that don't go beyond the school day. But a few of the participants described multi-ethnic relationships that often resulted in "partying with whoever just wants to have fun", as Sandy Yusuf put it, regardless of race. Jason Joseph said that he has male friends from "all races", their commonality being sports. Indeed, Patrick Bouchard claimed that all of his non-White friends were from soccer teams he played on throughout his adolescent years. Herb Kullar, a Sikh male, pointed out that some of
his more academically-inclined male cousins have friends who are “Chinese, White, whatever”, as long as they share a similar interest in particular subjects. It appears that a passion for certain things such as sports and academics can overcome social obstacles, allowing for good friendships to develop between anyone, regardless of one’s background.

There appear to be social forces, however, that work against friendships developing between two adolescents from different ethnicities. Only six of the twenty-five participants have regular friends who do not belong to the same ethnic group or race as themselves. Beyond a doubt, the ideology of racism is involved. Examining how it is involved is the main purpose of this chapter.

THE CHINESE STUDENTS

There’s always fights between the Chinese and the East Indians... When I was at Victoria Park there’s always, you know, the Italians against the regular White people... And the Filipinos against Chinese. And then Chinese against Vietnamese... It’s between all types of races.

Jennifer Tran, age 19

All five of the Chinese students acknowledged that, in general, Chinese people are racist toward Vietnamese people. In fact, each one of them spoke candidly yet cautiously about a hierarchy within what they refer to as “the Oriental culture”. Apparently, people from Hong Kong sit atop this hierarchy, followed by the Taiwanese, then people from Singapore and downwards until the mainland Chinese and finally the Vietnamese are positioned. After the individual interviews it appeared to me that this hierarchy was based upon the overall wealth of each society. During the group interview, however, I stood to be corrected, somewhat at least, by their assertion that the hierarchy was based on contemporary fashion. Lydia Leung put it this way:

Lydia: Well, Hong Kong is more civilized than how it is in China. The people in China are not as... sophisticated... especially with, like, how they dress. And the Vietnamese,
The first point to be made here is that Lydia has never been to either Hong Kong or Vietnam. She is picking up her opinions from others or perhaps from magazines and films. More important is the contention that fashion is at the root of the differentiation. There is no question that fashion is important to many people, especially young people, and is used as an indicator of social class. It is also beyond a doubt that the hierarchy used in the “Oriental” culture of the Far East has been around for much longer than contemporary society’s obsession with fashion and is, in all likelihood, based upon wealth, my initial premise. This notion of the Oriental hierarchy will be examined further in this light in chapter 7. It is important to recognize here that this hierarchy exists. The implications for those at the bottom of the hierarchy are far reaching. Jennifer Tran’s parents, who moved to Vietnam from China during the Chinese war with Japan, took on a Vietnamese name, which they still have here in Canada. During an informal conversation with me after all of the official interviews, Jennifer shared an event that recently took place between her mother, who works as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, and her Chinese boss:

Jennifer: My mother complained to this man about, you know, like things to do with the work there. And you know what he said to her? He said, “You are at least five levels below me. You have no right to question me about these things”.

Apparently, the reference to “levels below” has all to do with the ethnic hierarchy and not only refers to management/employee relations. Jennifer explained further that if a Chinese person does hire a Vietnamese person, which she claims is rare, they automatically assume a position below all of the other Chinese employees.
Apparently, this arrangement continues even if the Vietnamese worker has been employed there longer than a Chinese worker. Furthermore, two of these students mentioned that it is definitely the case that many Vietnamese people are "scamming the government" to get welfare cheques when they shouldn't. Three of the five Chinese students come from families who moved from China to Vietnam during the tensions with the Japanese. Apparently, while in Vietnam the Chinese moved to positions of a higher status compared to their Vietnamese neighbours. This stratification seems to be based upon an essentialist argument of Chinese superiority in relation to the Vietnamese. They themselves are, in turn, made to feel inferior when compared to, say, people from Hong Kong.

Are these prejudices held by some Chinese people confined only to the peoples included in this ancient hierarchy? The transcripts suggest not, that this is only a small part of this attitude. Four of the five Chinese students said that they have picked up racist attitudes from their parents. Apparently, First Nations people are targetted as a "lower race", again based on an essentialist argument. Jennifer Tran, who appeared to have an ambiguous position, explains how and why her parents conveyed this message to her and her siblings:

Jennifer: When I was walking down the street, when I was very young, I'd see Native people lying on the street and nobody was acknowledging them...I was around six. My parents have always told me to stay away from those kind of people...They made me feel very nervous. I'd think, "Why are they lying on the street? Why don't they just get a job?"

PO: How would you describe your parents' views toward Native people, in general? Toward all Native people?

Jennifer: I think it's fear. I think it's fear of the unknown. Because my mother's got the impression that all they do is drink. And get drunk. And there are a lot of bad things that happen east side downtown like, you know, people snatching purses, that kind of stuff. I think that's the main thing she's worried about.
Jennifer's comments were echoed by the other Chinese students. It is apparent how the substance abuse problems of some First Nations people have helped create a stereotype of them among the Chinese people (among others). It was also very clear to me that none of these students, and I would assume their parents, have much of an understanding of the historical relations and context between the First Nations people and White people. For example, not one of the Chinese students knew anything about the residential school system that Native children were forced to attend.

All five of the students said that they and their friends often make fun of the other ethnic groups, usually but not always out of earshot. The general attitude is that it is perfectly harmless and not in the least bit racist if the ridiculed cannot hear the derogatory comments. Jennifer was the exception to this position, feeling the intention is more likely to be good-hearted when the comments are made in front of the other and consequently can be considered "a joke".

One interesting comment was made by a student teacher at Victoria Park Secondary in a conversation with me during a professional development day. This woman had a Chinese mother and a White father and spoke Mandarin. She explained that quite often a Mandarin word used for other "races" is racist by its very definition. For example, one used for White people is a derogatory term that implies a ghost-like palour of the skin. Apparently, she has repeatedly told Chinese students not to use the terms they use to point out one's "race". According to the Ming Pao newspaper, the largest of the Chinese dailies in the Lower Mainland and part of a Hong Kong newspaper chain, an informal poll showed that "57% of participants [here] acknowledged they had unconsciously discriminated against a person of another race" including Caucasians (Bolan, Vancouver Sun, March 20, 1996, p. A1). Although somewhat ambiguous, the newspaper article seemed to imply that the unconscious
discrimination they allude to is racist name-calling. This point corroborates the one made by the Victoria Park student teacher.

Moreover, the same Vancouver Sun article discussed the views of Max Yalden, the Canadian human-rights commissioner, commending the "Ming Pao newspaper for attempting to improve cultural relations". The Chinese daily had "asked the Lower Mainland's 200,000 ethnic Chinese to be more self-critical". The paper suggested that in order to "avoid raising intercultural resentments", the Chinese people here should not engage in personal habits such as spitting in public or flaunting their wealth and should respect traffic rules and store counter line-ups. The article apparently was published shortly after a series of "racially based outbursts" directed toward affluent Chinese people occurred in the Lower Mainland. To my knowledge, this acknowledgement by the Chinese community that they themselves have a role to play in lessening racist attitudes seems to be a rare public display from any ethnic group, at least in Vancouver.

THE VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

_Because they're mean...Like the way they look is really scary, right? And the way they talk. I mean, they're always drunk and she's afraid._

Rose Chuong, age 18, on her mother's attitude toward Native people

In chapter 5, it became apparent that there is a hierarchy within "Oriental" cultures. Because it is based upon wealth, Vietnamese people often find themselves in a subordinate position. How do the Vietnamese feel about their status at the bottom of the "Oriental" hierarchy? If the two Vietnamese students in the study are any indication, compassion for other ethnic "underdogs" is not a consequence. Both of them said that their Vietnamese friends routinely make fun of Native people, often referring to them as "chugs". It is not difficult to see one source of these views after hearing them describe
their parents' attitudes toward First Nations people, described in the opening quote. One could consider this as an individual's response to a culture of which she has no knowledge. However, the other Vietnamese girl, Thao Hoang, puts Rose's mother's response into context when she described her parents' views toward other “races”:

*Thao:* Well, the only thing that they don't like is when one group wants to be more dominant. You know, like that Indian thing where they wanted all that land... My parents thought it was dumb because it's like the Indians wanted to be separated from us. I mean, what for, right?

The attitudes the Vietnamese parents hold toward Native people indicates a lack of compassion for a group that has clearly suffered at the hands of another. In particular, Thao's parents appear to have difficulty understanding why Native people would want "to be separated from" the rest of us by attempting to have their long-standing land claims settled. This political statement demonstrates an acute lack of knowledge of Canadian history, let alone B.C. history, which is understandable given their short time here. Thao's parents may have heard such views spoken by White people or through the media, and have deemed them to be socially acceptable because of the frequency with which they are heard.

To be fair, both Vietnamese students are from families who have immigrated to Canada within the past fifteen years. It may be too much to expect them to have some knowledge and compassion for the First Nations people. After all, they have come to Canada to get away from extreme oppression in Vietnam. Moreover, many White people who have been here for several generations demonstrate a similar lack of compassion or knowledge of White oppression of Native people.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Rose was not happy with the way she has been treated by Chinese people. Yet she herself sees the Vietnamese and the Chinese as
equal. Significantly, neither she nor Thao expressed any resentment toward White people, or any other group for that matter. It was evident that Thao wanted to downplay the idea of racism in Vancouver during the interviews.

THE FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

All the Native people joke about White people... They've got a grudge. I think Native people will always have a grudge against White people. Cuz like, the problems have never been solved.

Jason Joseph, age 18

All seven of the Native students acknowledge that they know many Native people who hold “a grudge” against White people for the atrocities they have had to endure since the initial contact period. Each of them knew a lot about the history of relations with the Whites, including the land claims, the banning of the potlatch, the Indian Act, and the residential school system. Sky George explains why her father, who lives up north in Bella Coola, despises all White people:

Sky: I think he blames it on the residential schools. He says he hates them for what they did to him there. We try to explain to him that it was those people who did it and no one else... He just gets mad and says we don’t know anything about it.

This passage demonstrates the pain that former residents of the residential school system, an obvious example of institutional racism against First Nations people, still have to live with and how it affects their daily experience. Moreover, it illuminates a place where there may be intergenerational stress in many First Nations families. Sky’s father, through his hatred for all White people, demonstrates an awareness of structural, or institutional, racism against his people. By contrast, Sky’s mother, with
whom she lives on a reserve on the North Shore of the Lower Mainland, has many friends from different ethnic backgrounds, including White people. Here is Sky’s response to my inquiry about her mother’s views toward non-Native people:

Sky: She says everyone’s all equal. The only difference is how we’re brought up.

The assertion that “everyone’s all equal” is clearly coming from the colour-blind/power-blind discourse as outlined by Ruth Frankenberg. It is significant that Autumn’s mother is several years younger than her father and, consequently, was spared the experience of the residential school system. On the other hand, Sky’s father is obviously positioned in the “race cognizance” discourse, albeit from an angry and, perhaps understandably, racist place. Although Sky seems not to know why, presumably because he hasn’t articulated it in a clear enough manner, her father may have at least a partial awareness of White privilege and systemic racism that lingers to this very day (even though the residential school system ended in B.C. over thirty years ago). It is generally regarded that racism between Whites and Natives is on the rise in northern B.C., which is where he lives (Glavin, 1996, p. 173).

All of the Native students who have lived at least part of their lives in northern communities concur with the view that racism is worsening there. Melanie Felix moved to Vancouver in the summer of 1995 to finish her high school requirements at Spectrum. She described a recent event that occurred to some of her younger female cousins up north:

Melanie: My cousins, last summer, got into a confrontation with an older guy. He was an older White guy. He was, like, calling them down and saying all these, like, racist things. And he was, like, a lot older than them. So my uncle and my cousins, the guy cousins, got all mad. Like, why did this guy have to pick on the girls?...So they went over to this guy’s place and, like, just told him to watch his mouth.
They gave him a warning.

Apparently, nothing further has developed in this particular saga, but it is indicative of strained relations between the Natives and the Whites, especially in northern B.C. However, the north is not the only place for Native/White tensions, as Mary's narrative of her life in east Vancouver attests:

Mary: ...We all had our groups. And we were a bunch of Indians here and a couple of White people would walk by and we'd all stop talking...

Jason: And then make fun of them.

Mary: Yeah, we'd say whatever to them. And then we'd go on with what we were doing. And then there's lots of groups of girls, you know, where we'd just stare them down, try and scare them. We'd try to look tough. Sometimes they'd do it to us, you know, like the White girls would stare us down, too. Especially if there were lots of them and, say, only a couple of us....There's just a lot of pissed off kids around.

Jason: Everybody is.

Mary: You know, you have to have your guard up and dirty looks and standing there looking tough is part of it all. I mean things come from all over the place. You just don't know what to expect.

Needless to say, Mary's contention that “there's just a lot of pissed off kids around” has everything to do with why I decided to do this study in the first place. Although most of the discussion in this section has focussed on Native attitudes toward White people, east Vancouver's somewhat new multi-ethnic make-up appears not to have changed the prospects for friendships outside of the First Nations adolescent community. In fact, three of the students expressed some level of discomfort with Chinese people, although this comes as no surprise if one bears in mind the general
view of the Chinese students toward Native people. It is noteworthy, however, that the apprehensions felt by the First Nations students in no way compares to the obvious disdain many Chinese immigrants have for them, as revealed by the Chinese youth earlier in this chapter. In fact, Jason Joseph is the only one of the group who has non-Native friends. Mary tried to articulate her feelings around the issue of friendship:

Mary: It's not that I choose them because they're Native. It's just that it happens to work out that way...I meet a lot of people, but when it comes right down to it, I can't relate to some people. You know, sometimes I'm scared cuz I don't know how they're gonna react. I mean, I'm Native, and I make the attempts. And when I can't relate to them cuz it's not like I'm ashamed but... (hesitates)... when it comes right down to it, we all know what we've gone through, what our families have gone through... I can't even remember the last time I had somebody other than a Native come over to my house. I wouldn't know what to talk about. It's like, I don't know where they're coming from. I don't know how they feel.

PO: You don't know how they feel about what?

Mary: About a lot of things. I mean, when I go to work there are some people who go, "Your people are this and that." And I'll have to defend them. You know, I can't explain why there are so many Natives down on skid row. I don't want to explain it. So why would I invite them to my home?

The obvious hurt Mary feels as she recounts her experiences around relations with non-Native people illuminates a realistic perspective on why most of the First Nations students in the study have only Native friends. It does not appear to be often on account of racist attitudes they may have for other people. Rather, it is because only friendships with other Native people offer them the certainty of not having to feel "ashamed" or have to explain the dire straits that some Native street people are in. It is precisely because of a lack of understanding among the general public of the effects of systemic and institutional racism on First Nations people that the Native youth in the study, and presumably others as well, have for the most part only Native friends.
Except for the anti-White sentiments among some Native people, most appear to have a “forgive but don’t forget” philosophy as discussed in chapter 5.

THE WHITE STUDENTS

[Racism] is increasing here ... There’s your odd person that’s racist and doesn’t like Chinese people just because they’re Chinese... But most people who aren’t racist are being threatened by how many Chinese people are here now. Pretty soon it’s going to be a new Chinese colony or something. That’s just kind of a weird feeling I have. It’s getting kinda weird.

Craig Bogdan, age 18

Although all five of these students displayed racist attitudes during the interviews, all of them claimed that there was little or no racism at Spectrum. However, they seemed to consider overt, redneck racism as the only form of racism. All of them said that they would sit with anybody at a table in the lunchroom. However, by triangulating the data with regular observations made at lunchtime, I found possible evidence of racist attitudes: three of the students were never seen sitting with a non-White student at lunch, while Craig Bogdan occasionally sat with others. Only Cathy Parkinson regularly sat at a table that one or more non-White students sat at.

All five of the European-Canadians seemed to share a common passion for putting down Asian people, particularly the Chinese. In fact, the anti-Chinese sentiment was many times greater and expressed with much more zeal during the group interview than during all of the individual interviews combined. I found myself having to challenge their racist arguments by posing alternative views much more with these students than with any of the other groups in order to defuse their anger and frustration. I have already described many of their opinions regarding ethnic relations in chapters 4 and 5. These range from feeling indignation at having to hear a Chinese language spoken in public, to the feeling of White people getting “pushed to the side” and being forced to compete for academic grades and for jobs. Each of these will now...
be examined.

To begin looking at the attitudes of the White students toward hearing Cantonese spoken in public, I will recall a recent event that took place in the B.C. Legislature between two provincial politicians that I also mentioned in the Introduction. A Dutch-Canadian, Ted Nebbeling, took exception to having to hear Jenny Kwan summarize the government's Throne Speech in Cantonese, ridiculing her in a few Cantonese words he had learned (Smyth, The Province, March 30, 1997, p. A6). Ms. Kwan wanted to know why hearing Cantonese was so offensive, particularly since MLAs in the past have listened to speeches given in Punjabi, French and other languages (personal communication, May 17, 1997).

I mention this event to point out the similarities between the comments of the opposition MLA, who is White, and those of the White students in chapter 5 around the issue of having to listen to Cantonese in public. Certainly politicians can be seen as role models, especially if they are placed in the media spotlight. Mr. Nebbeling's unfortunate antics created a stir in the B.C. media that indicated tensions between European-Canadians and Chinese-Canadians, particularly emphasized in the letters to the editor of the major newspapers in the aftermath. The response indicates quite clearly that the sentiments of the students are by no means limited to alternative school adolescents in east Vancouver but reveal, at the least, a widespread unease over the presence of large numbers of Chinese people living here. The comments made in the following exchange illuminate this point:

*Patrick:* I think maybe the government should think about our own country and not worry about the immigrants. They should worry about the people sleeping on the streets and stuff and get them off the streets and working in jobs.

*Diane:* Before all the immigrants get them.

*Patrick:* Before we even let them come over here to live. It's like, "Here's a job or here's
The anti-immigration sentiments both Patrick and Diane expressed are obvious and were echoed by the other three White students, as well. This will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. The main point I wish to make here is to demonstrate how similar these notions are to those that eventually lead to the end of the affirmative action programs in California, considered by many to be a bell-weather of what is to come across many parts of the United States (and perhaps Canada, too). White youth in east Vancouver are extremely worried about securing decent employment during their adult years. A life of poverty is not out of the question, as indicated by Patrick's concern over the homeless people. In Vancouver, almost all of the homeless people are either White or First Nations. It very well may be the perception of many working-class White people that there are no Asian homeless people because they are taking all the jobs, either through nepotism or through the government's affirmative action programs.

Another point in the above group exchange has to do with the reference to immigrants either procuring employment or receiving welfare. Four of the five of them made reference to Asian immigrants coming to B.C. and taking "our tax dollars" through social assistance. However, a double-standard racist view became apparent as demonstrated by the following comments:

Craig: All Chinese people and East Indians seem to have very nice houses compared to what I've seen with my racial group.

Patrick: That's what I see, too.

PO: Does this bother you?

All 5: Yeah, hmm hmm (simultaneously in agreement).
Diane: It makes you jealous.

Patrick: It makes me jealous, that's for sure.

Craig: It makes it too hard for anybody else to be able to afford a nice house. It's gotten too expensive.

Keith: I can't see how when they don't have a high-paying job they can drive a Mercedes-Benz, you know.

PO: How do you know what type of job a person has?

Keith: Well, you know some of them and their parents. And you know they don't have high-paying jobs, but they own huge houses and the best cars.

PO: So how do you think they can afford these things.

Keith: With lots of money. I just don't know how they get all this money.

Putting the various arguments of the White students together reveals some conflicting ideas. They perceived that the Asian immigrants are taking their jobs with the help of the government. Those who do not find work go onto B.C.'s welfare rolls. At the same time, the huge houses are being filled by Asian families instead of White people. Because they do not have high-paying jobs, the implication is that criminal activity must be involved. And all of these claims are only based on speculation, the same type of speculation that leads to common stereotypes I hear from my students and elsewhere: that Asian immigrants on welfare are lazy and/or into crime; that Asian immigrants are taking all of the jobs; that Asian immigrants are driving up the real-estate prices in Vancouver and live in the most expensive homes. It is evident that for my students to discuss tax dollars and real estate prices, they have been picking up these economic-oriented myths from elsewhere. The three that exhibited the most racist attitudes all claimed that their parents have similar views to their own. This "White defensiveness" is a bastardization of what Ruth Frankenberg terms the "race
cognizance" discourse: some of the working-class people in east Vancouver, and undoubtedly elsewhere, feel that because their skin is white that they are being oppressed by the social and political institutions of our society.

The one White student who spent a significant period of his life in northern B.C., Keith Allen, is also the only one to claim that "Natives have more privileges than us now". At several times in the individual interview he quite clearly expressed strong anti-Native sentiments, as he did after I asked why his parents were opposed to the Native land claims negotiations currently underway in B.C.:

Keith: Up north you see, I don't want to really say, but you see a lot of low Natives. A lot of them are really good for nothing up there, right?

PO: Why do you say Native people up north are "good for nothing"?

Keith: They're just drunks. Spend all their money on booze.

When questioned further, it was apparent that Keith had no idea of the history between the First Nations people and the White settlers, nor did he show any interest in learning about it. Keith's views, however, are not an anomaly. It appears that many Canadian adults are unaware of the effects of systemic racism upon Native people. According to a recent poll conducted for the federal government by Insight Canada:

Six out of ten Canadians believe the federal government is too loose with taxpayers' money when it comes to funding native Indians.....And 40% believe natives have only themselves to blame for their problems.

(Aubry, Vancouver Sun, June 21, 1997, p. A7)

The discourse Keith used is essentialist, implying that Native people are inferior to White people. This is clearly indicated by his statement, "A lot of [Natives] are really good for nothing". It is in these areas where most of the land claims put forth by First
Nations people are taking place. It is, in all likelihood, not a coincidence that this is where the strongest resistance to these claims are (Glavin, 1996, p. 83). Many of the White residents who live in these disputed regions fear that their livelihood is at stake. Indeed, Keith's father is a construction worker who may feel this way. Speculation leads me to conclude that material considerations are at least partially at the root of the anti-Native sentiments in these areas. (One could probably make a case without much difficulty that the treatment of both Native North Americans and Black people by White people throughout history is also at least partially borne out of a desire to improve the colonizers' economic well-being.)

The "Whites first" mentality that Keith and, by his own account, his parents exhibit is also directed to other ethnic groups. Consider the following comments made moments later in the individual interview:

PO: Do your parents ever make comments about other ethnic groups?
Keith: They make comments about that Legion thing.
PO: Who did they think was in the right or wrong there?
Keith: Well, they think the Whites are in the right. Obviously.
PO: They think that the Sikhs should just take off their turbans if they want to go in the Legion?
Keith: Yeah, of course. Whatever's for one side they think it should have to go for the other side, too.

Cathy Parkinson, the female student who moved to Vancouver from the Okanagan Valley the previous summer, expressed similar views toward British Columbia's Sikh community. It is noteworthy that the Sikhs are the only ethnic group to have settled in the Okanagan in substantial numbers other than Europeans and, of course, First
Cathy: I remember a friend, while he was going to school in the Okanagan - that was after I quit - he was telling me, as a part of their culture, East Indian people they wear the turbans and they wear the knives, or what not, on their belt. And in our school you weren’t allowed to bring weapons. But they were allowed to bring their knives in because it was part of their culture, religion, blah, blah, blah. That caused a big problem.

PO: With whom?

Cathy: Everyone in the school. The Whites.

PO: Did the White students think this was unfair?

Cathy: Um hmm. (She nods). You know. And they’d have their rules, like, if you touched their turban, you know, in a bad way, then they could take out their knife and kill you. (She laughs). So it was kind of a little bit hard to take.

PO: Who told you that they could take out their knife and....

Cathy: My friend told me because he was in a situation with one East Indian and the East Indian warned him. But...my friend kind of egged him on and wanted to, you know, he was just curious about it.

PO: He was curious to see whether the other guy would take out his knife and try and kill him?

Cathy: Well, nothing really came of it. It was just getting away with something....I don’t think the East Indians should be allowed to bring knives to school. Because there’s a rule in the school for safety. And I don’t think they should be allowed to just because it’s part of their religion. I don’t think a religion should be allowed to change the law for one group of people only.

Both Cathy and Keith are adamant that there should not be different laws for the various ethnic groups, despite traditional practices. In this respect, they are espousing the rhetoric of the popular western Canadian-based “protest” Reform Party. Their leader claims that it believes in “equality for all Canadians”, and as such, puts forth
ideas like "no distinct society status for Quebec" and "no recognition of First Nations' land claims" (Glavin, 1996, p. 117). On the political front, the Reform Party represents the "New Right". During the interviews, it became evident that each one of the White students seemed to be at least partially affected by the philosophy of the New Right, its influence apparent in the construction of their own identity as well as their view of the Other.

At best, much of the arguments of all five of the White students toward all non-White people could be interpreted as coming from an assimilationist perspective. More likely, however, they appeared to be exhibiting what I have been referring to as "new" racism, or a clash of values between cultures. I contend that much of the attraction in B.C. for the Reform Party is based upon the unease created by this "clash" of cultures. Diane spoke of the attitude of her mother, whom she claims is a Reform Party supporter, after I asked about her mother's views toward non-White people:

Diane: She's close-minded about it...She thinks they're less than what she is....I've dated people of different cultures and I just like my own. It's nothing against them. It's just that I like my own....My mom likes it better now because I'm going out with someone of my race now. And she likes him a lot. It's different.

Diane's views clearly have been influenced by her mother's. Furthermore, it appeared that all five of these students have more or less adopted their parents' attitudes toward people from other races or ethnic groups. However, generally speaking, I consider the underlying motivation for most aspects of racial tensions, even these "new" ethnic tensions, to be the result of material concerns, based primarily on wealth or the perception of wealth. The perception of the White students in my study that Asian immigrants are buying up the best houses and cars and that Native people have the most privileges substantiate my position. This is the line of thought I will
explore in the next chapter that deals with social class and identity construction. It also informs my recommendations for curriculum reform. (See Chapter 8).

THE INDO-CANADIAN STUDENTS

...You see like the Chinese coming here from Hong Kong. They are all rich. They're from rich families. They don't need no jobs. They are just taking over.

Herb Kullar, age 18

The above quote is a classic example of an ethnicity/class intersection. Four of the six Indo-Canadian students in the study expressed some concern over competing with the Chinese for jobs in the Lower Mainland. However, more frightening were the descriptions that some of the students gave of tensions between the Indians and the Chinese in the large high schools on the east side of Vancouver. Here is an example:

Mandy: We had that problem last year at school: Chinese against the Brown. At Johnston, you know, they were getting into harsh fights with each other. It was really bad. There were cops there all the time.

Baljinder: Yeah, the Brown and the Chinese. Like they'll split up into huge groups and it gets pretty wild.

Similar to the other ethnic groups in the study, the Indo-Canadians cite the large populations of the high schools as the fertile backdrop for groups to form along ethnic lines. In the following exchange, they explain how this process works:

Baljinder: ...Say you start to feel threatened... you know. Like say an East Indian guy walking around is saying, "Look at all these Brown guys". So the White guys who hear this start to build up a whole crew so they don't have to feel scared. And it goes on from there.

PO: Are you suggesting that fear is the underlying motivator that causes students to band together according to race?
Baljinder, Herb: Yeah.

Ronnie: Yeah, there's a colour thing. Like people trust their own kind more, to watch their back. I mean like, I got lots of friends from different races. I dunno like, I know my White friends would back me up. I dunno about some other guys. Like you know, other races. They just think of themselves as a little better than me.

Herb: It's like, you know, who do you think your real friends are? You usually think your own kind will back you up, no matter what.

Mandy: It does happen in high school. Like someone you don't even know, and say there's some trouble. Well, someone will back them up because that's their own race, even if they don't know them.

There is no question that the manner in which masculinity is socially constructed in western culture and the traditional cultures that my students come from is a large factor in why it is that simple conflicts between two males can escalate into racial "gang" fights. But there is more to it than that, of course. In the east end high schools, Hindu students bond with Sikhs, something almost inconceivable among their parents' generation, for protection from groups of Whites or Chinese. This in itself demonstrates the shifting dynamic within the ideology of racism. The so-called "enemies" for one generation are "friends" in the next for the sole reason that there is much contact with another group that appears to have even greater differences than the old foes. In other words, the new context of B.C.'s Lower Mainland has created unique conditions, which appear to drive many of the cultural changes that are currently taking place.

The Indian culture worked out a hierarchical social superstructure of its own centuries ago: the caste system. Apparently, one of the main reasons that the Sikhs broke away from Hinduism was because of their disdain for this system. Or could it have been because of their place within the hierarchy? Once apart from the other ethnic groups of India, they set up their own hierarchy, described here by the Sikh
students:

Mandy: ...You have this thing in India where there is this other race, I forget what they are called, and they are the servants in India. They are considered beneath other people in India. So when our parents come here they think it's the same way. Like they have this casting.

Baljinder: Meaning that one caste is better than another caste.

Mandy: Yeah. My mom is always saying, “Our caste is better than that caste”.

Herb: My mom is always saying, “Respect your caste”.

Ronnie: Yeah. My mom is always saying to me to respect your caste. All the time.

Mandy: I can marry someone from another religion. But I can’t marry someone from that Brown kind of thing.

PO: That Brown kind of thing?

Baljinder: That’s from the same religion as you but from a lower caste.

Herb: Yeah. Your parents will think you’re disrespectful to them.

Baljinder, Mandy: Yeah.

Mandy: There’s another type of Sikh, called the Pun. And they practice the exact same thing.

Baljinder: Yeah. And we’re not allowed to be with them.

PO: Do they feel the same way? That they’re not to mix with your group?

Baljinder: Yeah. They feel the same way.

Mandy: Yeah. But we do mix with them. Mainly at school. We just can’t marry them.

Herb: Someone from the lower caste would always want to marry someone from the higher one. It’s just that the people in the higher one are not allowed to go lower.

The implications for this strong practice of maintaining a stratified social system within both the Sikh and Hindu cultures is obvious. (Note: Ronnie, who is a Hindu,
made reference in the above dialogue that there is a similar system for the people of his religion). Indian children learn from a young age that some people are better than others, that there is a social hierarchy that is to be respected to the extreme. This archetypal structure, the hierarchy, has a place within their unconscious as they attempt to negotiate their way through the ever complex social world of Vancouver’s multi-ethnic populations. My students feel that their social world is much more complex than what their parents had to contend with while growing up in India or in Fiji. This has created some tensions between the generations of their families. Consider the following:

Baljinder: ...I have a friend who has parents who won’t let anyone who is not Brown into his house. You have to be their culture. You have to be Brown to be inside his house. They won’t let any White guys in, that’s for sure. So obviously, he’s only going to start hanging out with only Brown people, right. And I know a lot of people who are like that.

Herb: You know, I can understand your friend’s parents. Cuz like they probably see mostly White people smoking and drinking. They get this impression that White people are wild.

Baljinder: And they also know that a lot of White people stay out later. The kids go out and stay out late.

Mandy: Yeah, that’s right. The parents see it like that. That White parents are less controlling and less strict than East Indian parents.

Herb: Cuz they know the culture. Like they know how it goes. I know like for my mom. She was raised in a family and her dad died young. She had to always help her mom. Like she was raised where she would do nothing, like not have any fun. She would be working hard all the time, her whole life. And like, you know, some White parents, they’ve had fun. They know how it is.

Mandy: That’s not allowed in our culture.

Herb: Like my mom doesn’t even know what happens to us, out there in Canadian culture.

Ronnie: Same with my mom.
Mandy: My parents don't know either.

Herb: But we see it. Like, we understand the White culture. I know that the White guys I know, their parents used to party when they were younger. But then they settled down, have kids and all that. So they don't freak out when they see their kids partyin'. They know they'll stop one day, too. It's just part of the culture. But my parents don't get it. They're from a totally different world.

Ronnie: And having fun is not part of that world.

There is no question that the Indo-Canadian students perceive their parents to hold attitudes toward White people that could be considered racist. The clearest example of this was in the claim the students made in the above exchange that their parents strongly discouraged them from befriending White people. At the same time, it is clear that the basis of these attitudes stems from what they consider to be in the best interests of their children. I'm sure many parents from any ethnic group have similar concerns, although the key variable may not be another's race or ethnicity but rather their social class, religion or lifestyle. Discrimination appears from a variety of sources. This exchange also illuminates another tension within Indo-Canadian culture between the generations. Herb demonstrated keen observation skills as he put together the typical White family he had come into contact with and its relationship to leisure and fun. There are aspects to this that he not only understood but found appealing. The other students in this group agreed with this shifting attitude toward the often conflicting values, even within western culture, of fun and a proclivity toward hard work. These young people already appear to be having a profound effect on Indo-Canadian culture, accepting some of their parents' values while discarding others. Traditional Indian culture has a strong notion of the stratified society. Time will tell whether or not Indian youth will transform this idea into a more egalitarian vision. Some insight into the potential tension that the Indo-Canadian culture will have to
contend with in the near future is provided by the following sentiments, offered during a discussion about the idea of exogamous Indian marriages:

Herb: ...I feel kind of bad about that because I'm trying to stay with the culture, I guess. Because, you know, our parents, they brought us up this way. Like in the future, I know I'm going to have some Indian things. I'll have an Indian wife for sure.

Baljinder: I think it will be good if everybody married people from outside the culture because it will teach everybody to put their differences aside. There's more important things to worry about anyway.

Although Baljinder didn't explain what he hinted at in the last sentence, I assume he was referring to economic and employment issues because these were themes he brought up many times during the interviews. In fact, the majority of all twenty-five participants had concerns about their future employment opportunities. This is one area in which the federal government must listen to the concerns of the youth. In particular, the government must respond to the connection many of them make between jobs and immigration.

VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION

Canada was built on immigration, and over generations, Canadians have developed a mythology: The newcomer arrives poor, works hard and slowly moves up the economic ladder. But in the 1980s a new twist was added. The Canadian government...sought to recruit a different type of new Canadian....He or she would arrive on our shores highly educated, have access to capital and be a ready-made entrepreneur. And that is exactly what the quarter-million Hong Kong immigrants who came to Vancouver - more than 50% of whom arrived in the last five years - have been.

(Cernetig, Globe & Mail, September 30, 1995, p. D2)

...Immigration is a problem. The whole package is a problem. Whether they're rich or poor, it's still a problem....It's still a problem even if they're middle class. We've got regular middle class folks right here. We've got to
worry about them and not the middle class people over there.
Patrick Bouchard, a 19-year old European-Canadian

B.C.'s NDP government brought in anti-hate-speech laws because it worried the province was becoming a haven for racists and because it wanted to reassure immigrants, a government official said Thursday.
(Todd, Vancouver Sun, May 23, 1997, p. A1)

Some of the views of my students regarding immigration policy has been touched upon in the previous sections. In this section I will attempt to summarize the opinions of each of the groups and put forth a collective view for each, paying particular attention to the attitude of the White students. I have not separated the groups into sections for comparative reasons.

All of the First Nations students stated that Canada should accept anyone who wants to move to Canada. My own speculation as to why they may feel this way is because the First Nations people have suffered greatly at the hands of White people. Maybe they relish the thought of a multi-ethnic society rather than the binary relations of Native/White contact. Melanie Felix's comment may provide a slightly different perspective:

Melanie: ...the racism that we encountered, like it's sort of given us an understanding of what the other minorities are going through when people are being racist to them. Because we understand racism, right. It's just that we have a long history with it.

Similarly, the general view among all three of the Asian ethnic groups represented in the study was to keep on accepting immigrants at current or even increased levels. In the words of Thao Hoang, a Vietnamese female, "The more the merrier". However, one from each of these groups mentioned that Canadian government officials need to be more careful in screening out criminals. The other Vietnamese student, Rose
Chuong, explained:

Rose: ...I think that before they let somebody in they have to investigate as to whether
they deserve it... It depends on their background and the way their character
is... When you investigate you have to ask the authorities in their... camp, right. Ask,
"Are their records good?" or something like that, right. Because in the camps they
do have jails.

PO: Where are these refugee camps?

Rose: Um... Malaysia, Hong Kong.

PO: And are some of the refugees committing crime because of poverty?

Rose: Um no. Just like here. They just want to feel, "Great, I am better than you because
I can beat you up". And these people, these criminals should not be allowed in. But
otherwise they should allow people to live here.

This was the same perspective as both of the other students, Raymond Lam and
Moe Argun, who expressed concern over the criminal element slipping past
immigration officials. All three maintain that they are aware of criminal types who pass
through the immigration office's screening system and set up homes in Vancouver.
They strongly feel that the federal government needs to improve their methods of
detection. Otherwise, they feel the same as all of the other non-White students:
Canada should carry on with its present immigration policy.

The largest distinction between any one group and the others occurred over the
topic of immigration. All five of the White students were adamantly opposed to allowing
any more immigrants into Canada. The reasons ranged from crude racist stereotypes
to concerns for their own future, particularly in the realm of employment. To a large
extent, I feel that the former still relate to the latter, that is, many of the negative
stereotypes that the White students cited, particularly toward the Chinese, are borne
out of anxiety about their economic prospects. The following exchange during the group interview will partially illuminate the source of my speculation:

PO: Do you feel that immigration is having an effect upon your own employment opportunities in the future?

Patrick: For sure.


Cathy: Vancouver just seems densely over populated right now. And the reason that there isn’t a lot of jobs is because there is a lot of competition.

(All of the others agree with this point).

The conversation moved over to the double-sided racism discussed earlier in this chapter: that many Asian immigrants come over here and take up “our tax dollars” through welfare cheques, while the wealthy ones are driving up real estate values, making it impossible in their minds to ever own a house here. The role of the media must be taken into account here: in recent years there have been many newspaper articles discussing the wealth and economic views of many wealthy Hong Kong immigrants (Bramham, Vancouver Sun, June 19, 1996, p. A1). Indeed, one front page headline of the Vancouver Sun read: “Wealthy Asian immigrants ‘set to flee’ over taxes” (Chow, September 25, 1996; p. A1). It is my opinion that media coverage such as this only serves to reinforce ethnic tensions, particularly in these difficult economic times. However, at one point in the interview I was thrown off the track of bleak economic prospects being the main objection of the White students to immigration:

PO: So you’ve mentioned that you don’t like having to hear so many people speaking in a Chinese language on the streets. (They make sounds of agreement). Would it bother you less if the immigrants came from Europe?
(All but Craig Bogdan agree).

PO: Some immigrants are coming from places like eastern Europe: Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, places like that. Most of them don’t speak English when they get here. So why would it bother you less?

Diane and Keith: They’re White. (A few of them laugh).

PO: But you would still have the problems you’ve mentioned before: too few jobs, people going on welfare, not speaking English, those things.

Craig: They’re more respectful people, I think.

Diane: They’re very polite.

Patrick: Orientals spit a lot. They really do. (Many of them laugh).

PO: You know, these comments you are making about Asian immigrants used to be said by English and French Canadians about eastern Europeans and southern Europeans such as Italians. Now all this has changed and they are accepted.

Keith: Well, I don’t know. I’d just rather have Europeans here, any Europeans. At least they can drive. (A few chuckle).

At first glance, the above exchange seems to demonstrate overt racism against people from Asia, and it is likely that this is at least partially true. However, on closer examination of the entire set of transcripts, I interpreted this to be that the White students are more than a little anxious about competing against Asian people, especially the Chinese, when it comes to both academics and procuring employment. I think Diane uttered the sentiments of many when she talked about the Chinese students who “always got As and Bs and they’d gloat about it” and Chinese people who were hired instead of her. Indeed, Chinese-Canadian activist Eddie Kwan, brother of the politician Jenny Kwan, said these very stereotypes, that all Chinese are excellent students, work exceptionally hard at whatever they do and never have time for fun, are obstacles to building relationships between the Chinese and European
communities of Vancouver (personal communication with me, October 25, 1996). It appears to be the case that these stereotypes are the reasons many of my White students would prefer to compete with European immigrants rather than with people from Asia.

RACISM AMONG EAST VANCOUVER’S WORKING-CLASS YOUTH: A SUMMARY

There is no question that racist attitudes are prevalent in east Vancouver today on the basis of the preceding analysis. Twenty-two of the twenty-five students felt that racism was increasing in east Vancouver. (Two said it has been about the same throughout their lives, while one Vietnamese student said it was decreasing based on her experience). Racist attitudes are not only within youth culture: indeed, by the students’ accounts these destructive attitudes are at least as strong among their parents. Moreover, ethnic or racial prejudice occurs within all ethnic groups and for a variety of reasons. As the transformation of Vancouver from a western urban centre to a postmodern metropolis continues, we can expect these attitudes to escalate, especially if we don’t attempt to ameliorate the situation. The interviews suggest that change for the better is possible: there were some examples of how members from each of the ethnic groups had changed their values, expectations and opinions of the Other in comparison with even their parents’ generation. Of significance is the evidence here that cultures do in fact change!

The Asian cultures represented in the study, originating out of China, Vietnam and India, have long ago developed systems of discrimination that maintain stratified societies. At an early age most children in these cultures learn that some people are superior to others. Indeed, I was surprised by the spontaneous outpouring of racist attitudes toward Native people by many of the Asian students in response to my
question regarding their parents' attitudes toward other races. All three of these
groups in the study, particularly the Chinese and Vietnamese, mentioned that their
parents repeatedly told them to keep away from First Nations people, citing racist
stereotypes as their reasoning.

It was apparent that much of the Asian social hierarchies stem from an essentialist
perspective, that is, a position that their group is inherently superior to another. For
instance, the Indo-Canadian students also described an anti-White attitude among
their parents that seemed to result from a concern for their children’s best interests and
not quite from the essentialist discourse on racism. That is, by the students’ accounts,
their parents seem to feel that many White parents have less control over their
children’s behaviour and this perhaps is the reason why leisure and fun are such an
important facet of western culture. It is possible that the anti-Native sentiments of many
of the Asian parents are based along similar reasoning.

All of the students from these ethnic backgrounds articulated experiences they have
had with redneck racism but had difficulty either identifying or articulating other forms.
However, a few of them recognized both polite racism and a new racism that is being
created out of a clash of traditional values and western values. An emphasis on hard
work over leisure and the desire to accumulate wealth are but two of these traditional
Asian values that are playing themselves out in sites as diverse as the school, the
place of employment and the street.

The First Nations students appear to have had to endure the most racism of any of
the groups. Although some of them described an unease over contact with Chinese
people, they did not articulate anything that would indicate awareness of the low social
position they occupy in the minds of at least many of the Asian students in the study.
However, each one of them was very sensitive to the longstanding racist attitudes of
many White people toward them. Many of them were aware of institutional and
systemic forms of racism against their people. All of them knew many Native people who "hold a grudge against White people" for the atrocities they have had to endure. Apparently, these tensions are rising, particularly in northern B.C., where land claims negotiations are presently taking place. A few of the students have parents who talk to their children on matters of race from a "colour-blind/power-blind" discourse. Their strategy in using this discourse may be to protect their children from what they perceive as a no-win situation if they were to claim injustice from a race cognizance point of view.

The White working-class students appeared to harbour by far the most resentment toward the other groups. This may be due to the fact that they were most comfortable expressing their views to a White interviewer than the other groups were. Whatever the reasons, there seemed to be a simmering anger that they no longer enjoy any privilege in our society, even though their skin is white. At first, none of them could see any other form of racism except redneck. After some reflexive analysis of the situation with this group, however, some of them had glimmers of how systemic racism has worked to keep both First Nations and African American people down. Every one of these students to some degree accepted the dominant right-wing political stand of the present day and felt that there should be only one law for everybody, negating all historical concerns. All of them are worried that their own well-being may be in jeopardy because of competition from Asian people, particularly the Chinese, regarding academic access and employment. Most of their racist attitudes, especially toward the Chinese, appear to stem from material concerns.

The attitudes of all of the White students toward the contentious issue of immigration leads me to the following conclusion: at the least, the federal government has to make a much stronger effort to teach Canadians about the positives of immigration. The goal must be to lessen fears about their economic prospects and to
lessen racism here, particularly in the Lower Mainland. It is apparent that the federal policy of Multiculturalism isn’t enough.

Material concerns appear to be at the bottom of many of the racist attitudes of the majority of the participants. The stereotypes of the poor Native person living on the street, of the wealthy Chinese person driving up real-estate prices, of the new immigrant going on social assistance, of the White family raising youth who only want to party and not be concerned with hard work are but a few indicators that access to wealth may indeed be a large factor in the increase in ethnic tensions in recent years in Vancouver. It is this notion that guided me through the next chapter’s analysis.
CHAPTER 7
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of CLASS IDENTITY

Think of a parade, one-hour long, and everyone in Canada is to march in front of us, with the poorest at the front and heights representing assets. There would be nothing for the first 15 minutes, representing people who own nothing or are in debt. Then there would be a gradual rise. But at the end of the parade, at the very last minute, people are over a mile high. At the last second, you get the biggest tycoons, and they are 198 miles high.

Journalist/Author Linda McQuaig
(Stainsby, Vancouver Sun, December 2, 1995, p. B6)

This project is primarily concerned with the construction of identity among east Vancouver’s working-class youth, both in terms of ethnicity and class. In chapter 3, I outlined the definition of class that I am using in this study, namely, a material dimension only. It is based upon the manner in which each family was able to bring income into the home. This was instrumental in selecting the participants for the study. I wanted to know what their notions of social class were and how they located themselves in these terms.

In this chapter, I also analyze the perceptions the students have toward wealth and the distribution of wealth in our society. How did they view the wealthy, the poor and economic inequality in our society? In chapters 5 and 6, I showed that material concerns were involved in the formation of students’ ethnic identities and racist attitudes. To what extent were they aware of the powerful economic forces in our society and the effects of these forces upon their lives, both now and in the future?

For the majority of the students I interviewed, there were three social classes in Canadian society: the poor, the middle class and the rich. As a corollary, almost all of the students considered themselves to be middle class. This is no different from studies of working-class Canadian adults who, for the most part, also consider themselves to be middle class (Lambert et al., 1986, pp. 379-399). The only exceptions in my study were two White males and one Indian male who identified
themselves as working class. All three have parents who belong to a union. As well, two Native students, one female and one male, and one White female, considered themselves to be poor and part of the "lower class".

Because there was such a strong identification with the middle class, many of the participants have bought into middle-class arguments put forth in the corporate-owned media such as favouring tax cuts and a belief that we can no longer afford to help the poor. Except for three students, no one spoke out against these measures. It is noteworthy that all of the participants come from families that benefit from public tax money. The interviews suggest that there is an acute lack of understanding on the part of the students regarding major socioeconomic forces that pertain to their lives. For instance, not one of the students was able to articulate what the term "free trade" means, although each one of them said they have heard of it many times on the news. For the students, measures of social class were confined to material wealth, with a person's clothes, vehicle or house being the main indicators. Values and lifestyle had little or no influence in determining a person's social class. In other words, their idea of class was in similar terms to what I have used throughout this study.

The notions of social class among the participants were, for the main, in agreement with a study done on Canadian adults in 1984 (Lambert et al., 1986). In this study, "45% of the sample said the idea of social class had no meaning for them or they were unsure of its meaning" (p. 379). Of the remainder, the majority considered distinctions between social classes to be in material terms only, as it was for most of the students. In my study, however, there were differences among the students regarding the poor and the wealthy. It is clear to me that ethnicity has a part to play in influencing one's outlook toward the poor, the wealthy and wealth itself.
CHINESE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS

I think the poor are more jealous of the rich...It's how people think, like, 'I'm working my ass off and making only $7 an hour. And here this other guy is just talking. And he's like making $5000 a month. Just for talking! "...There's really nothing I can do about it. I think it's not fair. But then, life is not fair.

Lydia Leung, age 18

According to the five Chinese participants, the typical Chinese attitude toward social class was the importance put upon the accumulation of wealth. Money appears to be the only true measure of social class. Lydia Leung said that her parents would be much happier if she ran a successful corner store rather than if she received an excellent liberal arts degree from university but did not make much money with it. It appears that there is a different social evaluation that many Chinese people place upon a certain type of job in comparison with western liberal thought, although some White parents would perhaps feel similarly. In other words, there is a different amount of occupational prestige put upon certain jobs that is related to culture. Many of the questions I had for Jenny Kwan, a Chinese-Canadian MLA in east Vancouver, had to do with statements the students made on class issues. She had this to say in response to the students' comments about wealth:

JK: I try to get the Chinese people I am in contact with to see that success can be measured in many other ways other than in material terms. It is important to show them, as well as others, that wealth should not be the only way to measure the success of a person.

Jenny Kwan (personal communication, August 7, 1996)

The idea of self-sufficiency seems to be at the root of many of the Chinese students' views toward social class. For example, there appears to be a stereotype that Chinese people put a lot of value upon education. I asked Jenny Kwan if this were true and
what fields of study Chinese parents would consider to be worthwhile endeavors for their children:

JK: Any field of study that will help generate money is considered worthwhile in Chinese culture. The sciences and medicine are for sure considered good things to go into. So is law. A degree in business administration would also be considered worthwhile. Success is attained by a person when they have a business or career that enables them to be self-sufficient. For most Chinese people, educational choices have to do with being able to provide for their family.

All three of the female Chinese students spoke of plans to attend post-secondary education, although only Jennifer Tran’s intention of becoming a lawyer fit into Ms. Kwan’s theory of what was acceptable to Chinese parents. Both of the others expressed a desire to become elementary school teachers. Interestingly, all three said that they plan to be rich in ten years. This leads me to speculate that they either have an unrealistic vision of attaining wealth through this line of employment or that their understanding of “rich” is in line with a teacher’s salary. It is also possible that their aim is to acquire wealth through marriage. Consider the following comment by Nancy Wong:

Nancy: My mum wants me to marry a wealthy guy. Like she always hopes for that.... He doesn’t have to be rich but it would be better because then he would take care of me more.... My father would be really happy, too.... But they don’t want me to be with a Vietnamese guy. My mother doesn’t like their traditions and stuff. She thinks that Vietnamese guys beat their wives.

From Nancy’s first two sentences, it appears that her parents have not encouraged her to strive for a career or lifestyle that is not dependent on a husband. In fact, all three of the female students said that their parents repeatedly encouraged them to attempt
relationships with males from wealthy families. It is possible that Nancy's mother's attitude toward Vietnamese males as potential sons-in-law is also based on the perception that they are more likely to be poor rather than wealthy. This is yet another example of how ethnicity and social class are often entangled, in this case producing a negative stereotype of Vietnamese men.

There appears to be a different set of expectations for the Chinese working-class male youth, at least for those who don't demonstrate strong academic skills. Neither of the two male students had plans for post-secondary education. This leads me to speculate that the expectation for the Chinese male to provide for the family no matter what determines his future choices. This would describe the situation for both David Yu and Raymond Lam, both of whom stated that they would work at a job, any job, as soon as they finish high school. David said he expected to continue working at Shopper's Drug Mart after graduation. Both of them acknowledged that they are unlikely to become wealthy through work. The males also had no aspirations to marry into wealth. As Jennifer Tran puts it, "It's easier for society to accept a woman marrying into a rich family than for a guy who doesn't have any money to do it". I have no illusions that this sentiment is confined to the Chinese culture only. However, it seemed that the only other ethnic group in the study to emphasize the idea of the female "jumping class" by marrying into wealth as much as the Chinese youth were the Vietnamese students, although the two Indian females spoke of similar aspirations. As it appears that the motivation for the young women to marry into wealth is to be better taken care of by their husbands, I can only assume that they have as yet not been influenced by feminist philosophy.

The attitude of the Chinese working-class youth toward the wealthy seemed to differ along lines of gender as well, ranging from male indifference to a respect and almost sympathy from the females. This I attribute to the possibility open to the females of
perhaps entering the wealthy strata of Chinese-Canadian society via marriage, a path not open to males. It would be interesting to see if these people will feel the same way toward the monied class in twenty years time, especially if they are not able to satisfy their parents’ dreams regarding their marriages. All three of the female students believed that any class tensions that may exist in Vancouver are simply the result of jealousy on the part of those “with minimum wage jobs” toward those with money. In their opinion, everyone wants to be rich and this is why, as Nancy Wong put it, “Everybody else wants to put them down”. Some of the students in the other ethnic groups felt similarly but it wasn’t emphasized to the degree it was here. Recall that Jennifer Tran explained that wealthy Asian immigrants offer more than cultural diversity: they also offer investment money and jobs. Jennifer further stated her support for the monied class in her response to my question regarding curriculum reform that addresses the distribution of wealth in our society:

Jennifer: I think it really depends on what school the teacher teaches in. Cuz if the teacher is in the west end and he says that, then the students will say, “Aw, this guy’s just poor and he wants someone to feel sorry for him”. [She chuckles]. “Just because we’re from a rich family, he thinks we’ve done something wrong”. If the poor say something, the rich just think, “God, you just want us to feel sorry for you”. And teachers, who don’t make a lot of money, talking about this will only make the rich students feel they just want more money for themselves. Cuz like, you know, teachers can talk about this and the next thing you know, teachers have gone on strike to get more money. You know, who are you to speak?

Jennifer’s comment demonstrates two things. First, there is a distinct respect for the wealthy to the point of not wanting them to have to suffer through any feelings of guilt that may be brought about by classroom discussions of wealth distribution. Second, the part of Jennifer’s response regarding the poor’s desire to receive sympathy, and perhaps money, from the wealthy implies that a person’s social class is something that
can be easily changed, that perhaps even the slightest increase in one’s income will result in someone’s admittance into a higher strata of society. Most of the students in all of the ethnic groups had a similar sentiment. Consider Jennifer’s response to my follow-up question:

PO: Well, what about on the east side of Vancouver where a lot of students come from economically disadvantaged families? Do you think that it would be fair for this topic to be addressed in east Vancouver high schools?

Jennifer: Well, families on the east side, they think that teachers are already making a pretty good amount of money. And for a teacher to speak about helping the poor and stuff, they would just think, “All talk and no action”… There are certain ways of dealing with the poor than for teachers to talk about it.

PO: Do you have any ideas on how the issue of poverty should be dealt with?

Jennifer: I don’t know. Maybe churches, things like that.

This view obviously doesn’t leave much room for curriculum reform that has the aim of understanding the unequal distribution of wealth in our society. The two other female students were also opposed to economic inequality being addressed in the classroom. Jenny Kwan was not surprised to hear of their reluctance to have teachers speak on the unequal distribution of wealth. She suggested an alternative way for this topic to be included in the curriculum, one that would make Chinese working-class youth feel more comfortable. (See the section on Curriculum Reform in the next chapter). I include this excerpt at this point simply to demonstrate the respect and sympathy for the wealthy that all three Chinese female students, as well as both the Vietnamese females, stated throughout the interviews. The two Chinese male students simply said that there is nothing that can be done about wealth disparity in our society so why bother talking about it.
By comparison, the attitudes of the students toward the poor was, for the most part, one of blame. They showed little or no sympathy for the poor and often referred to them as “bums”. David Yu gave his view of the poor:

David: Well, they didn’t like work hard enough. Like they can’t get jobs and stuff., I don’t know. Maybe they spent all their money on alcohol and drugs. And now they’re addicted. I don’t really know about them because it’s not me, right? All I know is that I have to work hard so everybody else should have to work hard.

Both David and Raymond appeared to never have given a moment’s thought to the plight of poor people. This may be understandable when one considers their cultural expectation of the male as provider for the family. The two Chinese males in the study had to contend with how to make ends meet on their own. As David implied, he was not expecting anyone to help him out financially and nobody else should either. This idea can be expanded to include Canada’s social programs. Four of the five students said that their families were at one time on social assistance until they became self-sufficient. At the same time, all of them said that welfare is “stupid” and that there is a lot of “scamming” going on, implying that many people are illegally receiving social assistance.

Where does this attitude of never concerning themselves with anyone outside of the family come from? As Chinese-Canadian scholar Kyo Maclear points out, there is a traditional cultural value based in Confucianism that translates into a “respect for authority” (Maclear, 1994, p. 55). In Chinese culture the most powerful are often the most wealthy. In the opinion of the Chinese students in the study, the attitude of the wealthy Chinese toward the poor can be summed up as follows:

Nancy: The wealthy really look down upon the poor.
David: Yeah. That's right.

Lydia: The wealthy people from Hong Kong really like, despise poor people. They think they're lazy.

Jennifer: Yeah. But there's people like that in all cultures. In Chinese and Vietnamese cultures, and in all cultures I think, money talks. And that's how they think. Money talks!

PO: Do you think this philosophy is in all cultures?

Jennifer: Well, in modern civilization, in the modern world now, yes I do. I think a lot of the olden day things are lost....I mean you can't see it anymore. It's just like the Chinese culture when they come to Canada, a lot of things change. It's not the same as the way it was in the old country. Everybody in Canada are all immigrants. So everybody here is changing. All the old ways are gone. And so everybody like, you know, understands that money talks.

The above exchange during the group interview illuminates several things. First, it is clear that the people with the money "despise poor people"; hence, all the people who respect them and listen to what they have to say, such as my students, feel somewhat the same. Two of the female students revealed that they used to feel ashamed because of the second hand clothes they wore to school and because of their family's socioeconomic position. Second, Jennifer's assertion that "everybody in Canada are all immigrants" implies that First Nations people are invisible, that they don't count. Perhaps Jennifer considers them as part of the "old ways" that are gone. This attitude may come from being raised in a family that considers First Nations people to be inferior from an essentialist perspective. And lastly, the entire discussion tacitly intimates an utter lack of acknowledgement of the liberal idea of the social welfare state that emerged out of western industrialized nations after the second world war. Jenny Kwan summarized this attitude as follows:

JK: Recent Chinese immigrants view Canada as a place where one can realize their
dreams for a better life materially if one works really hard. Social programs in Canada and the United States and other western industrialized countries are not valued as much by most Chinese people. They feel that in countries such as Canada, if you try really hard, and work hard, that you can make it, that you can make a lot of money. Personally, I agree with the idea that a person has to work hard. But I also see that this alone does not make for a fair system....Not everyone has the same opportunities to get ahead. And this is a problem I have with the common idea in Chinese culture that it is up to the individual only to figure out how to get by or how to make it..... But this all fits in with the notion of "competition" in Chinese culture. It is an important factor in academia and in business. You get ahead by working hard and competing against the others....And therefore they do not like our welfare system....To accumulate wealth through hard work is a very important and worthwhile goal in Chinese culture!

These comments acknowledge that the students’ views toward wealth fits in with traditional Chinese values. Ms. Kwan’s reference to the idea of competition in Chinese culture may also explain why I perceived these students had a disdain for Canadian social programs. Moreover, it explains why they did not want teachers to discuss economic inequality in our society. Perhaps they understood on some level that the topic of tax reforms penalizing the wealthy may be discussed in some classrooms. This idea seems not to fit in with traditional Chinese values. It also illuminates a difficult area for curriculum developers to address.

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS

Everyone chooses their own route, where they want to go and if they end up with no money that’s not everybody else’s concern...You have to want to make something out of yourself so you don’t have to be poor...And you have to work hard for it. Some people don’t even care.

Thao Hoang, age 18

The views of the two Vietnamese students toward wealth, poverty and social class in general were very similar to the views of their Chinese peers. In fact, Thao Hoang espoused more disdain for the poor than anyone else in the entire study. Rose
Chuong, who lives on social assistance with her mother and two brothers, was not surprisingly more sympathetic toward the plight of the poor. However, both cited hard work, a desire to marry into a wealthy family, and the accumulation of wealth as values worth striving for. Thao repeatedly pointed out that “the rich have had to work hard for their money”. Consider the following exchange with her that began with my question inquiring about Thao’s feelings toward poor people:

**Thao:** Well, it makes the government look stupid because they should concentrate more on those people and not just people on welfare. Welfare, I think is dumb because it’s just for lazy people.

**PO:** What makes you say that?

**Thao:** I’ve met some of them. They have hands. They have legs. They can work. It’s just that they don’t want to... The majority can work. Except for the disabled.

**PO:** What about a single mother with a small child, or even two, at home? Is receiving welfare understandable in this case?

**Thao:** No, cuz it’s her fault. She got pregnant and if she was going to keep it then she should try and work hard to raise her kid. Because my friend got pregnant and she didn’t depend on welfare. She just got up, got out, worked until she was eight months. Then she stopped for a couple of months. Now she’s working again.

**PO:** How did your friend get money while she wasn’t working?

**Thao:** Through welfare. But it’s understandable cuz she was only on it for as long as her maternity leave was for. Six months.

**PO:** And who looks after her child now that she is back at work?

**Thao:** Um. Her parents or a sitter.

**PO:** But what about a single mother who doesn’t have any extended family around who can help her out?

**Thao:** I still don’t think they should depend on welfare. They can get a job and work.

**PO:** What happens to the child while they’re at work?
Thao: They go find a job that will make enough money to pay someone to look after the kid. And if you can't then you have to work two jobs. If the child is really important to bring out into this world then it should be important for you to work and give that child what you want that child to have.

PO: But if you're working two jobs, the time available to spend with the child is very little.

Thao: You have to sacrifice a bit.

The "tough love" approach put forth by Thao may provide some insight into the priority at least some Vietnamese people put upon material provision for one's family. Thao has clearly stated that for her it is more important for a single mother to be financially self-sufficient than to provide the emotional support and love many people feel is necessary for the best interests of the child. There is no question that she despises the welfare system. During the group interview with the Chinese students, Thao stated that even if the government were seriously to attempt to help the poor it would be in vain because "it's hard for the poor to adjust themselves, to behave themselves". The puzzling aspect to this is that her own family was on social assistance upon arrival in Canada. Thao dismissed this reminder by saying it was only for a little while until her father obtained work as a fisher. It appears that the value of working hard and not relying on others to help is as important for the Vietnamese as it is for the Chinese. This may be more understandable when put into context. My own perception of Vietnamese history is that the people have had to endure much hardship, often at the will of the government. Jenny Kwan agreed with this view. Thao's lack of sympathy for the less fortunate clearly has something to do with her own character construction, but it perhaps also has to do with the Vietnamese experience both in Vietnam and in Canada. It may simply be a reaction to the often heard complaint that many of the immigrants are using up tax dollars in receiving welfare. This attitude toward the poor is not confined to the youth, as the following account
given by Thao of her parents’ views demonstrates:

PO: What about your parents’ views toward the poor or homeless people?

Thao: My parents aren’t really, even though they’ve lived here for a long time, they still don’t understand those kinds of things. Like, for example, like gays and lesbians. My mum didn’t think that existed until I told her. Like cuz, they see that and they don’t know what to do except walk away, right?

PO: What do your parents do when they see panhandlers on the street?

Thao: My mum just walks by them cuz she doesn’t understand what they’re saying to her anyway so she just keeps walking.

PO: Have you ever explained to your parents what those people are about?

Thao: Um...well, my parents do understand they have no home and no money. But my parents probably wouldn’t give them any money anyway because, I don’t know, they’ll probably go use it for, like, alcohol or something.

PO: Do you mind telling me what your parents did for money in Vietnam?

Thao: Farmworkers. Then my mum was a vendor, selling candy....They were poor.

PO: Are they glad to be living here?

Thao: Oh yeah. They like it here way more than Vietnam.

It was apparent during discussions around class issues that Thao wasn’t as comfortable as at other times during the interviews. This could be the reason why she changed the subject from panhandlers to “gays and lesbians” and why she initially said that her mother “doesn’t understand” what panhandlers are asking of her. There is no question that her parents understand poverty, given their background in Vietnam. Their attitude toward the poor, which Thao seems to have inherited, appears to be rooted in an individualism that encourages self-sufficiency rather than compassion. It is quite possible that they have never received much compassion from others, except
for the two years they received social assistance from the B.C. government.

The attitude of being perceived as having some wealth, and therefore status, develops in at least some Vietnamese youth quite early in life. Both females said that it is very difficult to make friends in school if others see you as poor. Rose Chuong describes her school experience:

Rose: Before, when I was young, like, I didn't have either money or the clothes. We didn't have those things at all. We only had enough money to survive, barely. And when I went to school I didn't dress according to the fashion or according to whatever my friends are wearing, right? They kind of looked down on me. And sometimes they gave me dirty looks. They talked behind my back. But then I know that but they don't know that I know that... That was in elementary school and in high school... Yeah, it hurt but it's life. What am I supposed to do? Come up to them and say it's not my fault?

It is not unusual for clothes to be an indicator of social class, especially among young people. Many of the students from all of the ethnic groups in the study mentioned feelings of shame around their family's perceived level of income. However, the key point to be made in Rose's comments is to be found in her last phrase, "Come up to them and say it's not my fault?". Throughout the interviews Rose expressed views that indicate a contradictory consciousness around the notion of social class. At times she said that many people don't deserve welfare and are "scamming" the government because they are simply too lazy to work at a job. At other times she stated that it is not necessarily the fault of the poor that they are where they are, that they may come from poverty or an abusive background. Although these apparently opposing views of compassion for the poor and blaming them for their lowly position are frequently found in Canadian culture, they seem to be more pronounced with Rose. This tension within Rose's philosophy in all likelihood stems from the contradiction inherent in the value put upon wealth in the Vietnamese culture.
she has been raised in and in her own family's poverty. Indeed, Rose stated that some of her mother's Vietnamese acquaintances “look down on her” because of her poverty. Rose said that it is this condition of poverty that has lead her younger brother to become involved with gangs, bringing some much needed income into the household. It is no wonder that Rose has a complex view of social class and status, especially toward society's poor people.

FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS

No one wants to beg, right. No one wants to beg. But if he's sitting there, and he's got no good clothes on, or maybe he's screwed up in the mind, he's got to beg! He's got nothing. He can't just sit there. No one is gonna hire him. Even panhandling is doing something!

Jason Joseph, age 18

The First Nations participants appeared to have a much more complex relationship to those people with little or no money. By contrast with their Chinese and Vietnamese peers, they spoke very little about what they feel toward society's wealthy class. However, when the topic turned to attitudes toward the poor, a quite sophisticated view emerged that seemed to weave together an understanding of systemic racism and its effect on a person's social class and a hope that life can get better if only one can develop the self-esteem necessary to become disciplined.

None of the First Nations youth have ever known anyone who is wealthy. Significantly, when I attempted to phone the students to set up the group interview, four of the six phone numbers were not in service. Indeed, every single one of them was raised in a family that was and is on welfare. Yet five of the seven used terms such as “average” or “in the middle” when I queried about their family background in the individual interviews. Further, all of them stated that the students in the big high schools are divided along lines of wealth: the kids with money consider themselves "cool" and superior to the poor and, therefore, "uncool" kids. Each one of them felt that
the racism that they had to suffer through during elementary school was tied into their poverty, the clearest example of an ethnicity/class intersection in the entire project. Jason Joseph explains:

*Jason*: When I was in elementary school from probably, like, grade four to seven it was tough. The kids didn’t like me cuz I couldn’t afford to buy good stuff. The way I dressed. Cuz of my race, too. Right? But I got by all that. It doesn’t bother me now. No one does that to me no more cuz I won’t let them.

With this comment, Jason has made a connection between his race, his class and, at least in part, the construction of his masculinity. He is known throughout the student body at Spectrum as a very athletic and tough fellow, occasionally coming to school with evidence of receiving some physical blows the previous night. Jason made several comments regarding his quest for “respect” from other males out in the community. It was apparent, to him as well as me, that this was a strategy not to let his own self-esteem plummet because of the poverty he lives in. Jason has been raised by his “alcoholic” mother, a woman who raised herself “on the streets of Skid Row” and has to look after his younger brother because “she’s just not there for him”.

Many of the First Nations students spoke about family support as a prerequisite for self-esteem. Mary Pelletier explained her relationship to money by connecting it to her family:

*Mary*: ...Money is not like a big essential to me. Like yes, I’m working because I need to survive...but money does not run my life. I mean, I can go home anytime broke. I can phone home today and I could probably get enough money to get home tomorrow on the bus. I mean, they’ll take this hat and say, “Mary wants to come home”. It’s been done. They’ve proven that. And like I said, I could jump on that bus. I could go home broke and stay there and my family would take care of me. Money is not a problem. And that’s the way I was born and raised.
Clearly, Mary is exemplifying a different attitude toward money and wealth than, say, the Chinese and Vietnamese students. Indeed, the First Nations students in general were different from all of the other ethnic groups in the study in this regard. Only Jason Joseph expressed the desire to become "rich" one day. For all of the others, to have enough money "to get by" was all they hoped for. They said this even though all seven of them expressed a strong desire to do post-secondary schooling. And all seven of them said that they wouldn't be able to go to college if it wasn't for the federal government's policy of paying the tuition of all First Nations people.

It was evident that the concept of family was of paramount importance to these students. A dominant theme throughout the interviews with the Native students was that a person who comes from a strong family is better able to cope with problems. They all felt that this can provide a person with the emotional strength to help a person keep off the street, "to get by". Some of the students stated some faith in the meritocracy system, that an individual can overcome obstacles and "make it" through hard work and discipline. Apparently, for these students to "make it" refers to living in a home, any home, and not on the streets. For them, ending up homeless is a potential reality with which they must continually contend. Angel Pelletier offered her perspective on what it means to be a homeless panhandler:

Angel: When you get to the point in your life where you have to sit on the sidewalk, sit in your dingy clothes, or your underwear, smiling because who knows why, and begging...it's rock bottom. And it's not easy to get out of that place. It's just impossible to get some nice clothes, fix up your hair, and then walk around all day applying for jobs. You know you're going to be hungry those days....It's just really hard to get back off the street once you are there.
It is evident that Angel has some understanding, even compassion, for the unfortunate people who end up living on the street. Although most of the First Nations students were able to articulate the effects of systemic racism, primarily from White people, upon their peoples, there was still an apparent reluctance to come right out and claim this as the reason why there are so many Native people living "down and out" lives. Jason Joseph's response to my question regarding who's to blame for the condition of poverty exemplifies this:

Jason: I think it's society that does that to people. Racism and stuff. But then after they've been given some opportunities to like, better themselves, and if they're still in trouble, then I think it's their fault. Even though I know it's still hard to get going, there's still people looking down on you. I do think it's their fault. But it's tough cuz, you know, you don't look like everyone else. Those people who can't handle it, there's gotta be somebody to help them cuz, like they might not have any family to help them, right? No one cares about them. They can't even care about themselves.

The several switches Jason made between the second and third person statements are indicative of the inner tension he has, and I suspect the others have as well, with respect to faulting the individual poor Native person while at the same time acknowledging what systemic racism has done to Native people. Speculation on my part makes me wonder if blaming the victim is a strategy of the students to give them the impetus to strive for a life that is not "down and out". Indeed, all seven of these students expressed a similar perspective toward the poor. For example, Leonard Lewis expressed a lot of sympathy for the street people, described countless examples of racism against Natives, yet stated matter of factly that it is the individual's fault for ending up on the street. By his own account, his mother shares this view:

Leonard: ....My mum says it's their fault, at least in a lot of ways it is. Cuz all they got to do
is just stay in school or something like that. That's what she thinks. I don't know. It's hard to explain....I think it's half and half. I know it is their fault a lot of the time, but sometimes, I don't know, it just happens to some people.

PO: What is your mother's attitude toward the panhandlers on the street asking for change?

Leonard: Oh, she'll give them some change lots of times. So will I, if I have any.

Leonard and, apparently, his mother both feel that the meritocracy system is the one First Nations people should utilize to get out of poverty. They contend that it is an individual's fault if they end up as substance abusers living on the street. Yet at the same time they give their spare change to the panhandlers, belying what they say. Indeed, it seemed to me that Leonard was simply reluctant to complain about what has befallen his people. After all, as mentioned in chapter 4, he has recently found strength and pride in his Haida heritage. What else is involved with what I considered to be a hesitation of all seven participants to talk openly about the effects of racism? This was one of the places in the data collection and subsequent analysis where I felt I had to "tease out" their responses. As a non-Native person attempting to explore a quite painful topic with them, it became obvious to me that perhaps my own ethnicity or race may have been part of the problem.

There is little doubt that the mainstream perspective, generated in part by the White media, that Native people are often seen as demanding too much, has had an effect on all of these students. Indeed, recall the recent poll mentioned in chapter 6 in which, according to the polling company, "Six of 10 Canadians believe the federal government is too loose with taxpayers' money when it comes to funding native Indians" (Aubry, Vancouver Sun, June 21, 1997, p. A7). They must try to come to terms with the contradiction created by the observation that a disproportionate number of First Nations people are obviously suffering with the opinion of many other people that
"Natives have more privileges than us" and "Natives are trying to be more dominant", as two of the other participants claimed. Mary Pelletier demonstrated this tension with the following series of comments, made at different times during the two interviews:

#1: There are a lot of places where you can go for help. I'm working downtown eastside, right. And I see all these organizations who are there to help. People driving around in vans, you know, just to help other people out.

#2: I can't do anything about the panhandlers! I'm barely making it myself! I'm trying to work hard here and I'm not about to throw it away on someone who can possibly go out and work.

#3: I'm living in an area now where I see the people on the street. And I think to myself, "That could be me any day!"...So I do my best not to judge them. They have their reasons for being there.

#4: ...There are some people who go, "Your people are this and that". And I'll have to defend them. You know, I can't explain why there are so many Natives on skid row. But I say to myself, "That could be me any day".

#5: ...There are still going to be ignorant people around. And there is still going to be fighting. And there's still going to be people complaining about the Natives not paying taxes and stuff. And now with the land claims. I'm so tired of hearing people say, "All you Natives whine, whine, whine. Look at all you've got". And they just keep pushing this at us, all the time.

These comments serve to describe the extremely difficult place that First Nations people find themselves in today. Relationships with non-Natives are often strained by the racist mainstream attitudes. These students all agreed with one point: "Only Natives understand all the racism we have had to go through". There is no question to me that it has been the long history with White racism, in all its different forms, that has helped keep so many First Nations people down. And it was very apparent that every one of these students understood this, despite the reluctance to clearly state it. Yet each one of them expressed hope, a hope that racism against their peoples will
diminish with time, a hope that with hard work and discipline their lives will improve, that they will be able to procure steady employment and have a comfortable place to call home.

**WHITE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS**

The newspapers and the T.V. are always saying how great some guy is because he's made tons of money. This is just the corporations like, brainwashing regular people. It's kind of like the rich brainwashing the poor...to the view that the only thing worth doing is to try to make tons of money. All money. Just go for it. Strive for it. Forget about the poor. Forget about anything except for making money!...It's all just brainwashing.

Craig Bogdan, age 18

The five White students appeared to have some awareness of class issues as all five said that school curriculum should address the unequal distribution of wealth in our society. Two of them often demonstrated at least a "partial penetration", to use Willis's term, of how power works in our society, an example of which was the opening quote for this section. At the same time, however, they exhibited a contradictory consciousness in that they seemed unable to recognize similar class concerns among working-class people from other ethnic groups. None of them mentioned that there were members from other "races" or ethnic groups that even belonged to either the working class or the middle class. They spoke of either the wealthy or the very poor.

Two of the five White students have fathers who are members of strong unions. Both of these students, Patrick Bouchard and Craig Bogdan, were the only two who considered themselves to be working class. Cathy Parkinson said she was from "lower class", citing, somewhat facetiously, that Ethiopians were the only people poorer than her family was. Keith Allen called himself middle class, while Diane Thibault said that her family lives in an "upper-class" high-rise apartment in Coquitlam, although she emphasized that they are not rich, "just middle class". Diane's mother, a sole parent, is a manager at McDonalds.
The two children of unionized workers also showed at least some degree of partial penetration in specific ways. Both of them were able to articulate that some working-class people have middle-class incomes although they still belong to the working class. Most workers, they contend, have lower incomes, with Craig Bogdan adding, “They are the workers who definitely should be getting more money for the work they do because no one wants to be poor.” Craig’s opening quote was taken from the transcript of his individual interview in which he was making the point that the large corporations are using the media to promote the notion that “being rich” is the only way to achieve status in our society. He exclaimed, “Even my parents buy into this stuff. They always buy lottery tickets, hoping to get rich!” Patrick Bouchard demonstrated an insight into middle-class media representation of the working class when he said with some indignation, “They often show a fat plumber or an electrician bending over with his crack showing or something like that”. However, both of these students were limited in terms of class analysis.

Not one of the students was able to articulate any knowledge about what “free trade” means, even though each of them admitted to hearing about it “all the time”. Obviously, none of them was able to say how the free trade deals, such as NAFTA, would most likely affect the life chances of Canadian workers in the near future. This is significant for a number of reasons. First of all, the overall perception of the students is that high immigration levels are creating the distinct possibility they might not obtain stable, decently-paid employment when they are ready to enter the work force on a full-time basis. This creates a fertile climate for ethnic tensions to escalate, especially if recent trends in the economy continue. Statistics Canada reported that three out of four Canadian workers are in the service sector, which is “the fastest growing part of the economy” (Evenson, Vancouver Sun, March 13, 1996, p. A1). Unfortunately, this trend has created two others: “Long term job security is sinking fast, with wages in
tow”. The lack of good jobs and the poor economy results in an anxiety and frustration that results in blaming the immigrant, especially those from a visible minority. It is not difficult to envision how the ideology of racism can flourish in such a scenario. The White participants in the study do not contradict these assertions. Consider the following exchange:

Keith: If the economy was good people wouldn’t be as frustrated. A lot of people take their frustrations out on say, the Chinese or whatever, because they have the job that they could have, right?

Patrick: Yeah. I think people are racist toward other people because they have no money and are frustrated or whatever. But I think some people are racist toward other people because of the way they look and act, too.

Both of these students said that it is their perception that racism increases as the overall health of an economy decreases. The other three agreed with them on this crucial point. Of interest to me is the almost complete lack of understanding of how powerful economic forces are affecting their present and future standard of living. Today’s economy is oppressing the working class, but at the same time many people from the upper strata in our society are greatly benefitting from it (McQuaig, 1995). The obvious resentment these young people are feeling, however, is not being directed at the major players who helped create these conditions. Rather, elements of the New Right philosophy are surfacing in the students in anti-immigrant rhetoric, for instance. Patrick also made the important point that racism does not merely conflate to class issues, that it would still exist in a more egalitarian economy. The above exchange demonstrates, however, that some of the White working-class youth think that, at the very least, racism would decrease if the economy would turn more in their favour.

Further indication that the New Right may one day draw support from some of these
students is demonstrated by their views toward society's poor people. Three of the five students felt that the poor are responsible for their own socioeconomic woes. Diane offered her opinion:

**Diane:** I think poor people are not willing to try... If everybody tried harder, then everybody would be doing better, you know. It's just a matter of getting out there and really pushing yourself... It's up to the individual.

The pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps approach favoured by Diane was echoed by Keith Allen but with a difference: he felt the poor are either “too lazy” or “something's wrong with their head”, implying some sort of mental illness. This indicates that Keith considers only the extreme poor to be poor people, even though Statistics Canada estimates that in 1994, 20% of children in B.C. were living below the poverty line, over a 6% increase from 1989 (Bell and Munro, *Vancouver Sun*, November 19, 1996, p. B1). It is not difficult to see where Keith gets his views toward the poor from his description of his parents' views:

**Keith:** They can feel for some poor people, like a single mother with a couple of kids who doesn't have much money, right? But they can't respect someone who's married and both of them just sit around the house all day... And they just think the panhandlers are good for nothin'. They think they should be lookin' for a job. They would never give them any change or whatever.

By Keith's account, both of his parents show little compassion for many marginalized groups such as First Nations people up north where they used to live and Vancouver’s poor people. As a construction worker in a non-unionized company, Keith's father also apparently despises unions. All of these views are in keeping with the New Right social movement that is currently battling for power in many parts of Canada and the
United States. The only incongruence with the New Right in Keith's family is a sympathy for sole mothers, but there is an obvious explanation: Keith's mother separated from his natural father when he was five years old, raising her two children on her own for four years before Keith's stepfather, whom he refers to as his father, moved in with them in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of northern B.C. Consequently, they can understand the plight of sole mothers more easily than they can other marginalized people.

The five students of European descent had difficulty in seeing structural forces within the economic system, such as free trade deals, as at least a partial cause for the rise in poor people in our society. For the three students that did not have a unionized wage earner at home, union-busting was not a concern for them. Yet at the same time, some of them were able to articulate reasons that they considered our economic system to be justly unfair, such as in the following exchange that followed Craig Bogdan's comment that opened this section:

*Patrick:* Yeah, the media does try and make people believe that rich people are better than the rest of us, that we should respect them the most or whatever.

*PO:* What do you think could be the result of the belief that wealthy people are better people?

*Diane:* That the more poor you are the less of a person you are.

*Craig:* And it's their own fault that they're so poor.

*Patrick:* Right! And everybody will want to give less money probably. Like less money for welfare, U.I., stuff like that.

*Craig:* And medicare, too. Right?

*Keith:* I just think it could all change if they made society a little more equal. Like, gave everyone a chance to make money... Make it so the poor have a better chance of making some money, like, the people who grow up poor. Right now, it's the kids who grow up in wealthy families that grow up and make lots of money, become rich
like their parents. I think it's really unfair.

This exchange highlights a perception some of these students have that the media are not always telling the truth, that they do not have their best interests in mind. It also demonstrates at least a partial awareness of working-class concerns, such as welfare, unemployment insurance, medicare and jobs. Keith Allen, whose stepfather has decidedly right-wing political views, demonstrated the basis of a liberal philosophy developing with his wish for a more fair and equitable system to acquire a decent standard of living. For Keith a contradictory consciousness exists, as he was the most outspoken of the White students against Asian immigration, as well as the rights of Canada's aboriginal peoples.

There appeared to be an overall perception with these students that they are different from affluent people. It is noteworthy that not one of them has any friends whom they consider to be wealthy. Socioeconomic status seems to be at least part of the reason for this separation. The following comments demonstrate this:

Diane: I wouldn't want to be wealthy. I'd feel like a snob. I think they're snobs sometimes.

Patrick: I thought of kids that were rich as spoiled brats, you know. Like they'd flaunt it and stuff like that. I didn't really like 'em....Most of my friends are my friends because, you know, they're in the same situation and they're not looking at you and checking out what you're wearing or anything like that. And I don't do that to them.

From Patrick's comment we can see the process whereby young people from the same socioeconomic group are more likely to befriend one another than with someone from outside the group. It doesn't necessarily indicate any awareness of the
reasons for the great disparity in wealth in our society. Rather, it points toward a realization, perhaps unconscious, that a hierarchy exists in our society that rewards with status those with money. Similar to the process that creates groups of students to band together around ethnicity in the large high schools, there seems to be another condition for membership within a peer-group, one of socioeconomic commonality. And although this may create an atmosphere of class tensions, it is unlikely that any significant change in our economic system will occur from it.

A pertinent question at this point is what are the forces that shape a young person's attitude toward social class issues. The media and schools are two institutions that have already been shown to contribute. Moreover, it appears that, as with racist attitudes, the home is perhaps the major force in affecting a working-class person's attitude toward people at both extremes of the economic spectrum. Diane's comment that wealthy people are "snobs" is what her mother believes, according to Diane in another interview. Out of the five students, Patrick demonstrated the most progressive attitude toward the poor. By his own account, here is one of his mother's perspectives on social class:

Patrick: My mum thinks that the wealthy should do more for the people who aren't wealthy, like the homeless and food-bank people. And they should try and get everybody up to a level above the poverty line, you know, so there isn't anybody living like that. She thinks that, you know, rich people hoard all their money and try and make even more money instead of trying to help anybody else.

This is ample evidence that class attitudes can be passed down from one generation to the next. Keith Allen's curious mixture of a liberal philosophy and his parents' more extreme right-wing views signify that it is possible for a young person to change their attitudes toward the Other.
INDO-CANADIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASS

People like money, right. Everybody does. I see it in all the girls...When I go out I don’t have too much money. People can obviously tell that I don’t have too much money. It doesn’t make me feel too good. It makes me feel like I’m not going to get a beautiful wife or anything.

Ronnie Prasad, age 17

One of the fascinating aspects of listening to the views of the six Indo-Canadian students on social class issues was the divergence of opinion, sometimes along religious lines, sometimes based upon gender. Only one student, Ronnie Prasad, whose mother is a unionized hospital cleaning person, called himself working-class. Three of the students could not see any differences between working-class and middle-class concerns. And although none of them could say what “free trade” means, they could articulate a critical perspective on socioeconomic issues that differed greatly from mainstream views. For instance, the following exchange illuminates the lively nature of the discussion we had, showing that some of the students have at least a partial penetration as to how power and economics work in our society. It also highlights a seldom heard concern that there is only a finite amount of wealth in our society and it is not being shared fairly:

Baljinder: There are a lot of poor people in Vancouver because there probably aren’t enough jobs.

Herb: Yeah. And people are too greedy. They only think of themselves and not of the whole society.

PO: How would a greedy person keep someone else from getting a job?

Baljinder: They’d work more hours to make more money. Work overtime whenever they could. Instead of the company hiring someone else, too.

Moe: And some people are working two jobs. Like my dad. But he needs to do that to have enough money just to live.
Mandy: Lots of people are like that.

Baljinder: I think that if the government wants to let more people in through immigration then they're going to have to set up more jobs....You can't just let in people when they don't have a chance of getting a job. It's just going to be trouble.

PO: What kind of trouble are you referring to?

Baljinder: Well, some of the people will have to go on welfare to get by. And lots of people already here are going to be upset with that, how much it costs and all that. And then there's the crime thing. If someone wants a job and can't find one, and they're sick of being poor, they're going to turn to crime to make some money. So lots of problems.

Mandy: I think the problem is more computer-based. Now many companies are moving to computers and therefore they don't need as many workers as before. They are getting rid of the old jobs and replacing them with computers and a few new jobs for people who know how to use computers.

Herb: Yeah. Computers are definitely part of the problem of not enough jobs here. It's cheaper for the companies. And they are just thinking about making money. Not about what it all means for the whole society!

Mandy: I think it's okay for companies to use some computers. But not as many as they do. So that more people can have jobs. Because having more jobs is the important thing!

PO: But what if the big companies don't want to do this? As Harry says, it's cheaper for them to downsize on employees, and buy technology instead.

Baljinder: If the big corporations don't want to do it, then the government would just have to tax them and get the money that way. The government can help create more jobs. It sure would help the whole society.

There are several points I wish to discuss that the students brought up during this part of the group interview. First of all, two of the students referred to the overall or common good of our 'whole society'. They were the only students to mention this liberal concept in the entire study. This is significant because the common good is a
concept considered desirable in both the B.C. Social Studies curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the Canadian Constitution of Human Rights. Secondly, the first part of the exchange indicates that some of the students sense that there is a limit to both the amount of jobs and the amount of wealth in our society. Most of the participants from all the groups were aware, as most citizens seem to be, that governments are strapped for cash these days. However, only the Indo-Canadian students put forth the notion of reforming the existing taxation system to help create jobs. Their idea of tax reform was more in keeping with social democratic values rather than those of the New Right, such as put forth by the federal Reform Party and the federal Progressive Conservative Party.

The point made at the beginning of this exchange by Baljinder and Herb referred to an issue that the B.C. government has been attempting to address in recent months. The fact that many workers are trying to work as much overtime as possible is understandable. However, with a shortage of jobs for the unemployed, perhaps legislation could change this practice. Indeed, American social theorist Jeremy Rifkin spoke of such a move and its potential positive impact at a recent B.C. government convention, an idea which he puts forth in some detail in his latest book The End of Work (Rifkin, 1995). My experience as a teacher leads me to claim that these issues are not standard fare for adolescents to ponder. I can only speculate that these students have heard their parents speak of these labour issues.

Furthermore, these students were the only group to suggest that corporate downsizing was a factor in increasing competition for jobs. At another point in the interview, Ronnie, Baljinder and Moe stated that this same scramble for decent employment is helping to create an atmosphere of mistrust and fear between ethnic groups. Herb said that the "rich Chinese from Hong Kong...are just taking over". Competition for jobs was felt to be a main contributor to rising ethnic tensions in the
general opinion of the White students, as well. Four of the Indo-Canadian students, however, highlighted the role of corporate interests in the employment issue, as well as the overall good of the “whole society”. These students seemed to perceive that concerns differed by social class. A contradictory consciousness, however, was evident in some of the responses to my question regarding attitudes toward the poor:

Ronnie: I think it's their fault. I think that they could have made it in life. I think that if they took the right steps they would have made it in life.

Sandy: What can society really do to help them all anyway? Well, I guess they could give to the poor, like, give to the charities....I can understand, like, the mental patients who have those problems. And older people who are really poor. They need help. But there are a lot of poor people who are young. And I see that for these people usually drugs are involved. Major big-time drugs, too. And I don't see why everybody else is expected to help.

Herb: Yeah, I say that's their own fault. They chose that life, you know. They're gonna have fun. And they are gonna waste their money on that. And some of them waste their lives on that. That's the way it goes for some people. And society can't be expected to, like, help all those people.

It is difficult to understand why some of the students, particularly Ronnie and Herb, were able to articulate the effect of corporations upon society in general and the employment situation in particular, and yet still feel that the poor could have made personal choices that would have lead them out of poverty. They seemed to link young people who are poor with drug abuse, showing absolutely no compassion for these people. But could there be another reason? The following comments Ronnie made in his individual interview can provide some insight:

Ronnie: ....I see a lot of people not respecting poor people. I myself don't even talk to them. I don't know. I just don't talk to homeless people.

PO: What do you do when a panhandler asks you for change?
Ronnie: That happens every Tuesday. I go to the movies every Tuesday. [He chuckles, most likely because Tuesday movies are at half-price]. I don't even say anything to them. I... I feel so bad because I don't even have enough money for myself; I don't want to have to turn around and tell them, "Look here, buddy. I don't have anything for you. I'm having a hard enough time scrapin' a few dollars for myself."

At several points during the individual interview, Ronnie acknowledged his family's poverty, which worsened greatly after his father left the family three years before. I can only speculate that his lack of feeling for the extreme poor is based on similar reasoning that some of the First Nations students had with respect to the poor. If they claim that society is to blame for all the poverty, they may give up on their own individual quest to make it and find themselves in a similar predicament. As a corollary, by blaming the homeless person, each of these students may be unconsciously fanning an inner flame, developing an individual spirit that they feel may help them to a comfortable life. I describe this as an unconscious process because Ronnie was unable to respond after I suggested something along this line of reasoning. It was clear that Ronnie was unwilling to make connections between the economic system he criticized earlier and the plight of the extreme poor.

Sandy and Herb appeared to demonstrate disdain for poor people who are also substance abusers. Both of them said that this perspective had nothing to do with their religious or cultural beliefs. (Sandy is a Moslem and Herb is a Sikh). However, another Sikh student, Mandy, claimed that within the Sikh religion it is very disrespectful to a family's honour and name if one of their children becomes involved with drugs, among other things. This may explain why both Herb and Sandy took such a hard position with these people. Sandy also acknowledged that some people are born into poverty, yet she was still unwilling to say it is society's responsibility. Later on, she explained
the caste system of her culture’s religion. Conjecture leads me to think that the Indo-
Moslem caste system that Sandy was made aware of at an early age helped construct
her views toward the poor and, indeed, many of her notions about social class.

In fact, I believe that India’s caste system, as discussed in chapter 6, underlies many
of the views of these students regarding the Other. In India, one’s caste is an ascribed
characteristic, something that a person is born into and is difficult to change. Perhaps
this notion is at the root of some of the students’ apparent lack of compassion for the
poor and destitute. However, two of the students, Baljinder and Moe, were adamant
that the poor are not to blame for their lowly socioeconomic position. These students
were able to articulate a critical perspective on how power works in our society.

Consider the following comments:

Baljinder: No one chooses to be poor. For some people, they grow up poor. There’s no
money for them to get a good college education. So they can’t get a decent job.
And so they’re poor when they’re an adult, too. No one chooses to be poor.

Moe: It’s publicized that the poor cause more trouble. And that...basically that they
bring their poverty on themselves. And it’s publicized that the rich have never done
anything wrong. And for me, I see it that the rich have taken too much from
everybody else. And that’s why there are so many people having trouble getting
enough money to live.

Baljinder: I think the poor have good reasons to be angry with the rich class. Because I
mean, they struggle a lot more than anyone else just to survive. The rich don’t
have to struggle at all... I feel the rich can afford to help out the poor. I mean, all
it is for them is just basically giving up a couple of luxuries to help the needy.
But they don’t want to give up these luxuries, even if it gives to the poor what
they need to survive.

Ronnie: That’s why the wealthy should get taxed. People should get taxed on like....

Baljinder: How much they earn.

Ronnie: Exactly. What their income is. If you’re making millions, you gotta be giving out,
like, in taxes. That’s just how it should be. They’ll still be way ahead of everybody
else.
Sandy: Sometimes a lot of wealthy people have worked hard to achieve their wealth. It hasn't been easy for them. They've worked hard!

Baljinder: Maybe that's true. But they should still pay more taxes to help out other people. They should be more understanding.

Why is it that some of these students are able to break through the effects of the Indian caste system and provide suggestions of bettering the situation of the less fortunate? I can only speculate that the reason lies in the fact that the parents of Ronnie, Baljinder and Moe are all divorced, apparently a rarity in both the Hindu and Sikh cultures. Of all the participants in the study, Baljinder and Moe expressed the most progressive views toward the Other throughout the interviews. They also spoke of how difficult life became for their family after their parents separated. And some of the difficulties stemmed from cultural expectations, as Baljinder's comments indicate:

Baljinder: ...When my mom and my dad split up, and I was first living with my mom, we didn't have a house. We could only afford to rent this apartment. And in our culture people respect money. So people always looked down at her because she couldn't afford to own a house and because she was divorced. And then she did buy a house and all of a sudden everything changes. Now there are Sikh people who want to be friends with her because she's back in the same class with them.

Baljinder's parents separated when he was nine years old. His father moved to California, apparently to get away from Chinese people, and Baljinder lived with him for two years during his early teens. Baljinder also claimed his father would strongly disapprove of his son marrying anybody who was poor and who wasn't Sikh. He said his father admires the wealthy and couldn't care less about the plight of poor people. By comparison, Baljinder's mother's views were the complete opposite: she doesn't
like the wealthy, feels compassion for the poor, and would approve of Baljinder marrying anyone he wishes to, regardless of ethnicity and social class. It is difficult to say why his mother has left the traditional views of Sikh culture and embraced certain progressive, or at least more tolerant, attitudes toward other people while his father hasn't. Perhaps she had to contend with more negativity from other Sikhs over the divorce and her low socioeconomic position in the strongly patriarchal and materially-oriented culture. The point I wish to make here is that Baljinder appears to have embraced the views of the parent he has spent most time with in recent years, that of his mother. This adoption of parental views on matters social class was apparent with all of the Indian students.

Similar to the Chinese females, both Indian female students said that their parents encourage them to marry into wealth and strongly discourage them from marrying someone from a lower socioeconomic position. They stated that their parents want to arrange their daughters' marriages, although both claimed that they hope it doesn't come to that. Both have parents who do not empathize with poor people. Although Mandy showed some compassion with some of her statements, she and Sandy have generally adopted the views of their parents. As I mentioned regarding the Chinese female students, it would be interesting to find out whether they still maintain these conservative views into their late twenties, when the dream of marrying into wealth may diminish for those who haven't yet succeeded with this strategy.

By contrast, the four male students were much more critical of the wealthy class than their Chinese male peers, although Ronnie and Moe in particular seemed to have developed this perspective without parental influence. Moe had spent the past ten months working full-time at a quick auto tune-up place at minimum wage, having graduated from Spectrum the previous spring. Because of his recent experience, he was very aware of the notion of the working poor:
Moe: I get really upset when, you know, I work really hard and hardly make any money. I wonder how I'll ever be able to get my own place. Vancouver's so expensive. I should be making a lot more. And I see the people who like, say, in other countries, really poor countries, work really hard jobs, and really long hours, and hardly make anything. Even worse, you know! And it's not right. People need more money to live!

Compare Moe's critique of the economic system to that of the White students, whose main complaints about securing decent employment had to do with competing with Asian immigrants in a climate of uncertain job prospects. Moe's criticisms, as well as those of Baljinder, Herb and sometimes Ronnie, originate out of class concerns rather than concern over competition with other ethnic groups. These findings are similar, but not the same, as those of Lois Weis and Michelle Fine, who concluded that White working-class young male adults were more likely to blame Blacks and immigrants for their own employment woes, while their Black counterparts saw the economy and racism as the main obstacles. With the Indian males in my study, there seemed to be a consensus among them that their uncertain economic futures have more to do with corporate and ruling class greed than competition from other ethnic groups. In this respect, the Indian students, particularly the males, were able to articulate the clearest notions of class awareness, albeit with only a partial analysis.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL CLASS: A SUMMARY

The preceding discussions serve to make several points clear about how the east Vancouver adolescents in the study perceive social class. First, the majority consider themselves to share the concerns of the middle class and classify themselves as such. In the main, there seemed to be a "blame the victim" attitude regarding society's
poorest, although this was far from unanimous. Moreover, very few of them were able
to articulate criticisms of the ruling class, showing a much stronger tendency to point
the finger at other ethnic groups instead. Members from each of the groups believed in
the meritocracy system, although this was by no means a view held by the majority.
Furthermore, the positions of the parents seemed to be very much reflected in their
own views, although not as pronounced as with racist attitudes.

There appear to be tendencies toward similar views among members of the same
ethnic group, although differences are very apparent, as well. For instance, the
dominant attitude among the Chinese and Vietnamese students was to respect wealth
and competition and to place the notion of hard work and self-sufficiency above leisure
and the welfare state. These students voiced the strongest opposition to revising
curriculum so that wealth distribution could be examined in the classroom. There
seemed to be a lack of compassion for people living in poverty among these students.
Further, a parental push for the females to try and marry into a higher social class
appeared to exist, according to the majority of the female students. The males
appeared to be focussed upon the expectation that they must work hard in order to
become self-sufficient. These students have not been overly successful scholastically.
Consequently, the expectation, for the males at least, is for the notion of hard work to
be transferred from the school to the work-place.

There were some similarities between these students and the ones from the other
Asian culture represented in the study, the Indians. Traditionally, there was a respect
for the accumulation of wealth and the females also seemed to aspire to “jump class”
through marriage. However, there was a clear critique of the role of the corporate
sector and its effect upon society as a whole among some of the Indian male students.
There was some discrepancy regarding where to place blame for society’s poor
people. The youth who expressed the more progressive views toward the poor
obviously found less appeal in maintaining the traditional caste system. Overall, the Indo-Canadian students seemed to blame other ethnic groups the least and corporate interests the most in creating an uncertain economic future for them. In my opinion, they had the most realistic appraisal of our immigration system, citing social problems that will increase unless the economy addresses the shortage of stable jobs.

The White youth also demonstrated some disdain for the wealthy class. However, their own class concerns seemed to be limited to those from European stock only. Most of them seemed to have difficulty seeing similar concerns among the working-class members of other ethnic groups or races. This was most evident in their negative attitudes toward immigrants and Canada's immigration policy, although it appeared over other issues, as well. In this respect, they appeared to be buying into the New Right philosophy most evident within the western-based Reform Party in the Canadian political spectrum. Two of these students seemed to have found a "Whites First" mentality appealing. By their own accounts, this same pair have parents that espouse a similar philosophy. Like some of the Indo-Canadian students, some were acutely aware of the influence of the media on public perception and were critical of this.

The Indo-Canadian and White youth were joined by the First Nations students in approving of curriculum to address the unequal distribution of wealth in our society. However, the Natives were more likely to blame racist ideology rather than corporate interests as the reason that poverty is so prevalent among their people. At the same time, they were hesitant to distance themselves from the meritocracy system, perhaps gaining hope from having faith in it. There appeared to be a general hesitation among the First Nations students to claim that their situation will improve if non-Natives would change their attitudes toward them. At the root of this reluctance seems to be what they perceive as the mainstream view that they have already been given so much. In other words, they seemed to want to convey the notion that their well-being is up to
themselves and is not solely dependent on others.

Across all of the interviews, although there was some critical insight into how powerful economic interests affect their own present and future situations from some of the students, there was a definite lack of awareness of how power works in our society to keep many marginalized people from obtaining a comfortable life. Moreover, most of the participants were not able to comprehend the forces that were acting to lower the average standard of living of working-class people, some of the Indo-Canadians being the exception. This is understandable considering that the majority were unaware that they even belong to the working class. Ethnicity appeared to supercede class concerns in terms of common identity for the vast majority of the students. Increased ethnic tensions and racism were a result of this lack of class awareness. The major influences in constructing attitudes toward the poor and the wealthy appear to be the home and the media.

Corporate-owned media have a mandate to protect the interests of their owners. Therefore, it would be logical for them not to challenge the mainstream views, even mainstream confusion, over social class issues. Indeed, it is in their owners' interests to maintain the current level of analysis within the public debate, if not to obsfucate the situation even further. Most of the participants in this study hold economic views that do not significantly differ from current mainstream opinion. To be sure, these students are growing up within a neoconservative political atmosphere that I have been calling the New Right. It is difficult for today's youth to become aware of the dream of old liberals and social democrats alike: that it is a noble trait for a society to set up the apparatus whereby people share and help others to get started, much like Canada's social programs were intended to do. They will never come to a full understanding of these philosophies and social movements from mainstream corporate-owned media. It appears that they are not learning about these ideas in the classroom either.
CHAPTER 8
FURTHER ANALYSIS: CONNECTING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In the first part of this chapter, my intention is to analyze further the data using some of the models I described in the Literature Review (in chapter 2) and the section entitled Analytical Framework (in chapter 3). After this analysis, I will describe some instances in which I challenged some of the students’ attitudes by offering alternative views, followed by risks involved with this kind of work. The final conclusions of the study are at the end. Suggestions for curriculum reform, most of them either directly or indirectly based upon the study, have been included in Appendix 2.

ON RELATIONAL POSITIONALITY AND RACIAL DISCOURSE

The first and one of the most important finding in the project is that almost all of the participants felt that racism is on the rise in east Vancouver. It may not be surprising that many of the ethnic groups represented in the study contend that White racism is the most oppressive for them. The group interviews yielded the views that: most Native people “hold a grudge” against White people; many Chinese people experience White racism on a daily basis; Indo-Canadians endure more racism from White people than any other group. On the other hand, the data suggest that there are racist attitudes coming from and toward all of the ethnic groups in the study, regardless of whether or not White people are involved. There is more than sufficient evidence to demonstrate the validity of Susan Friedman’s assertion that binary models of analysis are not very useful in the postmodern, multi-ethnic society (Friedman, 1995). The students also used different racial discourses in their descriptions, often similar to the other participating members within their ethnic group, implying some sort of influence that
ethnicity can have on an individual's racist attitudes.

The students whose families came from the three Asian countries, India, China and Vietnam, described very ancient and hierarchical racist systems of oppression within their own cultures. The Chinese and Vietnamese are part of one such system that includes several cultures and nations. For example, the data demonstrated that Vietnamese people often find a limited number of economic opportunities for themselves within the east Asian diaspora. It appears that these hierarchies stem from an essentialist notion of superiority and are related to both the attainment of wealth and the opportunities to attain wealth. Jenny Kwan remarked about the place of her early childhood, Hong Kong, that also sits atop this hierarchy, at least in terms of status with the Chinese and Vietnamese participants:

\[JK: \text{...In places like Hong Kong, accumulating wealth is what it is all about. There is very little awareness of the discrimination involved in some people accumulating great wealth while others have very little.} \]
\[(personal\ communication,\ August\ 7,\ 1996)\]

Several of the White students seemed to put forth racist attitudes that derive from a similar essentialist perspective, except that their version places White people as superior to all others. These students do not feel that they have enjoyed any privilege because of their White skin. There seemed to be a feeling, however, that they deserved some privilege because of their skin colour. Timothy Stanley described how the B.C. public education system was part of a process that created the following unfortunate scenario: "by 1925, B.C....had been made into a white supremacist society" (1990, p.144). The curriculum and school system have changed drastically since then. However, Stanley contends that one of the ways in which White people managed to do this was by excluding the accomplishments of especially First Nations
and Asian people from the school curriculum. In my study, First Nations, Indo-Canadian and Vietnamese participants mentioned the Eurocentric school curriculum they have had to experience as problematic. The Native students demonstrated some resistance to this curriculum because all of those who switched into junior alternative programs for First Nations students claimed to have done much better because the curriculum reflected their own experience to a much higher degree than the regular curriculum. All of the non-White ethnic groups in the study had members who spoke of White teachers who gave preferential treatment to White students. My own experience as a teacher leads me to speculate that these teachers have been influenced by systemic racism that operates in subtle, almost unconscious ways, rather than originating from a White supremacist philosophy. However, the effect these attitudes can have on non-White students can be very negative.

The views of Diane Thibault and Keith Allen, and by their own accounts, their parents, demonstrate the "Whites First" mentality still exists. In fact, the data confirm what Lois Weis found in her study entitled Working Class Without Work: the oppression of the American working class in the global economy is causing a social trend she calls "the New Right", a highly conservative movement attempting to strengthen the patriarchy in the U.S. (Weis, 1990). In rural western Canada, this movement has been successfully mobilized by the federal Reform Party and is considered by many to harbour White bigots (O'Neil, Vancouver Sun, May 8, 1996, p. A1). This political party is Christian-based and has as some of its platforms reduced immigration, and refusals to settle or recognize Native land claims, Quebec's distinct society clause, and the rights of homosexuals. This Canadian version of the New Right espouses a philosophy that everyone is equal, which is a philosophy that can generate passion, especially in tough economic times. It is clear that the New Right movement is not interested in looking at the structures that work to create the stratified
society, such as systemic racism against Native people and issues of social class. It was evident that this social movement has had an effect upon the views of at least some of the White students in the study. I am in no way implying that these students have been politically mobilized into this movement. I am suggesting, however, that they appear to have been influenced by the New Right and are potential candidates to become part of it in the future.

The second discourse in Ruth Frankenberg’s taxonomy, referred to as the “colour-blind/power-blind” position, was also present in some of the students’ responses. For example, before I offered an alternative view, all of the White students dismissed White privilege and expressed disdain toward the view that Natives and African Americans are disproportionately located at a lower socioeconomic position today because of historical events. In other words, they were unable or unwilling to acknowledge how systemic racism operates in our society. It appears that they have been influenced, to some degree at least, by the liberal view that was prevalent in my own upbringing in the 1960s: that we are all equal and have equal opportunity to succeed.

The notion of meritocracy can be considered as part of the “colour-blind/power-blind” discourse. Interestingly, only one of the White students, Diane Thibault, appeared to have any faith that meritocracy works in a fair manner. All of the others seemed to be aware of the inequities in both educational and employment opportunities based upon access to wealth. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of the non-White students seemed to believe that meritocracy still works. There appears to be a “fit” between a system that rewards a person for effort and discipline and the traditional cultures of China, Vietnam and India. Faith in meritocracy is not unusual for immigrants to Canada. I was raised in such a household in east-end Toronto. However, there appears to be some connection with the cultural value they place upon hard work, primarily for the Chinese and the Vietnamese, and the negative
manner in which they view society's poor. For the First Nations participants, the complex view they exhibited toward the poor, and poverty in general, leads me to speculate that meritocracy offers them hope. It presents each of them with a hope that if they can be disciplined enough, then they can overcome the obstacles imposed by systemic racism and lead a somewhat dignified adult life. I sense that the reluctance of the First Nations students and most of the Asian students to complain about issues of wealth in our society are based on similar reasoning. These are connections that I found too difficult to explore further with them, however.

There was evidence of Frankenberg's third discourse, which she calls "race-cognizance", in a few of the student narratives. In both Frankenberg's and my opinion, this is the fairest discourse and the only one that can adequately explain the present stratified nature of our society. For the most part, this discourse was confined to students who were raised in families below the poverty line, such as those that had to rely on social assistance in order to survive. All of the First Nations students and Rose Chuong, who was Vietnamese, believed that their poverty had much to do with their "race" or ethnicity and very little to do with a fair and just system. Indeed, all of the First Nations students were aware of both systemic and institutional racism against their peoples since the early contact period with Europeans. In fact, it was the residential school system that Sky claimed was responsible for her father's hatred of all White people. Two of the Indo-Canadian male students, Baljinder Dosanjh and Moe Argun, also seemed to think about ethnic and race relations within the race-cognizance perspective, although their views seemed to originate from the early stages of class consciousness rather than from awareness of systemic racism. As well, two of the White students, Craig Bogdan and Patrick Bouchard, were able to shift into this discourse to some degree after I offered an alternative view as to why a significant proportion of some ethnic groups live in poverty. This revelation offers great hope for
educators who believe that racism acts to keep certain groups at a low socioeconomic level, that is, for those teachers who speak about ethnic and racial issues in the race-cognizance discourse.

However, it seems that the white defensiveness evident in some of the students of European ancestry also can be considered to be from the third discourse. In my opinion it is a warped version of race-cognizance but one that stems from similar reasoning as others use to point out structural forces that act to oppress certain ethnic groups. All five of the White students seem to believe that certain policies within the multicultural philosophy act to keep some White people at a lower socioeconomic level than they would be without these policies. I contend that white defensiveness in this context is created by both a lack of class awareness and a lack of seeing White privilege in our society. If the students were made aware of the concerns of all working-class people, they would feel an affinity across ethnic lines instead of feeling threatened by them. In fact, this was the same situation for Willis’s “lads” in Learning to Labour (Willis, 1977). They felt threatened by their working-class peers of Asian and Caribbean ancestry.

ON RACIST ATTITUDES AND ECONOMIC CONCERNS

It is my assertion that many of the racist attitudes demonstrated by the participants and, by their own accounts, their parents are borne out of material considerations. I entered the project wondering if this were so and the data only reinforced this notion. Often the parents’ racist attitudes can be seen as perhaps misguided parental concern for their children’s well-being. In fact, one of the most important conclusions for me in conducting this research is the following: almost all of the racist attitudes of both the student participants and, by their accounts, their parents can be understood as coming
from a concern for the economic well-being of the younger generation as adults.

For example, the Indo-Canadian students said their parents discouraged them from befriending Whites because they considered them to be “too wild” and not in the control of their parents. Consequently, it is their opinion that such friendships may deter their own children from the work ethic they wish to instill. Consider the White students’ angst over competition with Chinese youth in academics and on the job front. They sensed that the Chinese were more likely to put greater emphasis on the work ethic than on leisure. The White students had a sense that they had been raised to value leisure time much more than their Asian counterparts. These worries translated into anti-immigrant sentiments. White opposition toward the B.C. Native land claims appeared to be borne out of a concern for their own livelihoods, often resource-based, and a lack of understanding of the history of White/Native relations here. The attitude of Keith Allen, who lived a significant part of his life in northern B.C., seemed to confirm much of this theory.

Similarly, the negative light in which First Nations people were seen by most of the Chinese and Vietnamese students may have developed out of their parents’ worry that their children would not embrace the work ethic that these cultures value so highly. It is difficult to say whether the Asian students’ general view of the First Nations people’s predicament stemmed from an essentialist notion of aboriginal inferiority or if it is nothing more than believing in the work ethic to such an extent that a “sink-or-swim” attitude toward all people, regardless of race, was the result. One thing seemed certain: very few of these students displayed any awareness of the “race-cognizance” discourse. However, these families have known difficult times and have beaten the odds to have made it safely to Canada. For them, life may be seen as doing whatever it is that must be done to become self-sufficient, no matter what the obstacles. In this light, their racist attitudes toward Native people may be seen, at
worst, as a lack of compassion and, depending on their own histories in Asia and Canada, this may be understandable.

The New Right views of some of the White students verify what Weis and Michelle Fine found in their work, "Narrating the 1980s and 1990s" (1995): this is the tendency of young White working-class men, struggling to financially survive, to blame immigrants and Black men for their troubles. In my study, both genders expressed this attitude toward Asian immigrants, an attitude that seems to be connected to anxiety over competing with them. Weis and Fine also concluded that most poor Black men tend to blame racism and a poor economy for their woes. The First Nations students at Spectrum acknowledged White systemic racism in this respect. Some of the Indo-Canadian students blamed the influence of the corporate agenda for creating an unhealthy economy, rather than blame their uncertain futures on racism.

The last example to show that there may be understandable explanations for what can be seen as racist is in the friendships of the First Nations students themselves. In particular, all five of the female students said that all of their friends are Native. Their reason is not from any notion of superiority toward the Other; nor is it borne out a fear of competing with the Other. Sadly, it appears to have to do with a burgeoning exhaustion of having to explain to others why so many of their people are having trouble. In other words, they find it tiresome and difficult to try and make non-Natives understand the effects of systemic racism. All of these examples also serve to demonstrate the need for a "relational positionality" model, as put forth by Susan Friedman (1995), in analyzing social relations in the postmodern society.

In the literature review I asked, "Is there a connection between a person's ethnicity and the manner in which the ideology of racism has influenced them?". From the preceding discussion, there does appear to be certain racist tendencies particular to each of the groups in the study. It is also obvious from the above that material
concerns play an important and related part within the ideology of racism, especially within the race-cognizance discourse. It is beyond a doubt that both social class and ethnicity are crucial social divisions for everyone in our society, and probably in all industrialized societies. It is my contention that, based on the data, ethnicity supercedes social class in the identity construction of the east Vancouver working-class adolescents who participated in this study. By this I mean that virtually all of the participants saw themselves as a member of their ethnic group first and foremost, while only some of them perceived that they even belonged to a social class at all. Ironically, however, it is my own opinion that a person's social class determines their life chances more than their ethnicity or race.

ON CLASS ISSUES and CLASS AWARENESS

I have already pointed out the apparent origins of some of the racist attitudes within some of the ethnic groups, attitudes that are borne out of material concerns. To further this argument, it is important to point out that all but four of the participants stated that they have post-secondary plans. Yet almost everyone remarked that financial concerns may prove to be an insurmountable obstacle for them to realize their educational potential. Indeed, all seven of the First Nations students said that they could never afford to go to college if their "band" wouldn't pay. Studies show that income has a direct correspondence to a person's level of education (Curtis, Livingstone, and Smaller, 1992). Consequently, a lack of money for tuition is likely to have an effect on the Spectrum students' life chances, as well as the life chances of many working-class youth today, no matter what their ethnic background is. It appears to be true, however, that for the majority of members from certain groups, such as First Nations and the Vietnamese, continuing to experience poverty into adulthood is a
more likely scenario than for other groups.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of these working-class students considered themselves to be members of the middle class does not bode well for them. Without knowledge of working-class issues, they will have extreme difficulty in putting forth positions that have their best economic interests in mind, especially for the future. For example, some of the White students, whom I consider to be influenced to a large extent by the New Right, and many of the Chinese and Vietnamese students expressed views that are detrimental to their own well-being: less taxes and social programs (even though their social class benefits greatly from both), and a general anti-government philosophy are some key examples to demonstrate the potential pitfalls of not understanding one’s social class and its concerns. The fact that most of the Asian female participants were reluctant to hear criticisms of the wealthy and aspired to perhaps one day “jump class” by marrying into wealth also signifies that it will be a long time until they can be expected to demand fair tax reform and employment opportunities for the working class. These students also claimed that it is jealousy on the part of the poor that is causing class tensions to rise in this city, because “everyone wants to be rich”. There was very little awareness that structural forces exist that exacerbate inequities.

The students’ lack of knowledge about free trade and other aspects of how power works in our society is also discussed by Lois Weis in another work, *Working Class Without Work*, although her focus is on the American White working class (Weis, 1990). Weis concludes that the U.S. economy is working to increase the oppression of the working class, which I, as well as others, contend is also occurring in Canada (McQuaig, 1995; Barlow and Campbell, 1995). Yet the resulting resentment is not being directed at the major players who helped create these conditions. Rather, Weis claims that “racist and sexist attitudes seem to be on the rise because of it”. In Canada,
as mentioned earlier, this social movement is gathering mainly White people together in the political forum within the federal Reform Party.

Collectively, the students displayed little awareness of the forces that are most responsible for shaping their economic futures. The effects of the global economy, free trade, and feminism, and knowledge of how and why unions came about are but a few examples that the majority of these working-class students knew very little about. But were there any areas in which the students exhibited signs of at least a "partial penetration", to use Paul Willis's term?

To answer this question, I want to focus upon an idea generally credited to sociologist Nicos Poulantzas (1978), who contended that the practitioners of any dominant ideology attempt to maintain the status quo by obscuring hegemonic practices wherever possible. They do this by using society's institutions to separate knowledge from power. Educator Paulo Freire (1973) stated that critical pedagogy which includes avenues for student reflection, or "conscientization", can serve to bridge knowledge and power. Michael Apple (1985) has argued that once students possess critical awareness, power becomes a two-way struggle.

In my study, early signs of critical awareness were evident, although the translation of this awareness into the creation of ways to obtain power back seems not to have yet germinated into concrete political action, except in the case of one Chinese student who fought the provincial budget cuts to adult education programs. (See section entitled Challenging Student Attitudes). This is not surprising, considering the age of the participants. However, it is very possible that the politicization of some of these students will occur in adulthood. For instance, there were several examples citing the mainstream media's role in the manipulation of people's views toward the interests of the ruling class: several Native students discussing the treatment the land claims get in the media; Moe Argun's observation of how the media creates a connection between
crime and non-White people; Patrick Bouchard’s comment regarding the misrepresentation of working-class people on television and in Hollywood films; and Craig Bogdan’s statement regarding the notion of respect for the wealthy person for being wealthy. This last example also lead to several of the White students realizing that as the general public’s respect for the wealthy class increases, support for social programs may very well diminish.

The connection of knowledge and power that Poulantzas desired was also realized to some extent by the admission of the Native students that they were much more successful in the junior alternative First Nations programs than in the large regular high schools. The major reason cited for this reversal in their academic fortunes was the relevance of the curriculum to their experience and to their well-being. The relevance of curriculum was also a factor in many Asian students’ desire to learn the material in social studies courses.

ON GENDER

Throughout the analysis I have given only superficial treatment to gender considerations because of the overwhelming number of issues relating to ethnicity and social class intersections. However, by no means do I wish to discount the influence of gender on a person’s daily experience, their life chances, their identity construction, or their views toward the Other. In fact, there were many examples that demonstrate the ways in which gender interacts with the categories of ethnicity and social class. I wish to touch upon a few of these here.

First, it could very well be the case that certain forms of masculinity, particularly ones that promote “machismo” among the working class, are hindering a class awareness from developing across ethnic lines. Australian social theorist Bob Connell
explains how this process can work:

The social definition of men as holders of power is translated...into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body...It is very important in allowing belief in the superiority of men, and the oppressive practices that flow from it, to be sustained by men who in other respects have very little power. The importance of physical aggression in some of the major forms of working-class masculinity is familiar.

(Connell, 1987, p.85)

Several of the working-class participants spoke of incidents in which a small conflict between two males can quickly escalate into "a race thing", especially in the large populations of the regular east-end high schools. Apparently, even males who have never met each other are expected to "back up" someone from the same ethnic background in these situations. Moreover, one White male participant spoke of "gangs" of White youth fighting "gangs" of Chinese youth at pre-arranged meeting places.

Second, as previously mentioned, many Asian females are reticent to hear complaints about the wealthy class they hope to be fortunate enough to join through marriage. The one Sikh female in the study, Mandy Bhatti, expressed a desire to marry someone other than a Sikh because of the strong patriarchal aspects within their culture. All three of the Sikh males were unanimous in their agreement that their culture appears to be very sexist in comparison with others. One of the Sikh males, Baljinder Dosanjh, tacitly agreed with this notion of oppression when he stated that exogamous marriages would also result in less racism throughout society.

In Working Class Without Work, Lois Weis found that there was a potential for the young women in her study to be influenced by feminist philosophy. In my study, there was little evidence of feminist attitudes among any of the participants. These may have
become more evident had the general problem statement been different, leading me to ask questions in the interviews that reflected perceptions regarding gender issues. In the psychology course I teach at Spectrum, however, I do see the early signs of feminism in some students. The potential is always there, of course, and some of these participants may very well embrace a feminist philosophy in adulthood. One of the First Nations females, Mary Pelletier, did exhibit elements of feminism, particularly around issues of female independence. On the other hand, the desire of many of the Asian female participants to marry a wealthy man so that they may be better taken care of demonstrates the need for progressive curriculum in this area, as well.

CHALLENGING STUDENT ATTITUDES

Wow! That was really interesting. You know, I've never thought about all this stuff before.

Nancy Wong, moments after the individual interview ended

The purpose of this study was not merely to describe the ethnic and class attitudes of the Spectrum students. Nor was the sole aim to suggest where curriculum reform may help in promoting tolerance of the Other. Rather, one of my intentions was to encourage the emancipation and politicization of the researched, which is in keeping with the tradition of critical social theory (Gibson, 1986). In other words, an important aspect of the project had to do with challenging racist attitudes and positions on poverty that the participants themselves held. In this section my intention is to describe a few places where I perceived a change in attitude toward others, sometimes ever so slight, had taken place because of involvement with this project. I do not wish to put forth that the examples I describe are the best ones to be used in promoting tolerance
and understanding among working-class youth. They are examples, however, of what I did use in an attempt to overcome the obstacles that seem to get in the way of many people, regardless of age, forming a critical analysis of life in a postmodern society.

I withheld from challenging each student's attitudes of intolerance during the individual interviews. Indeed, it wasn't until toward the end of each of the group interviews that I would attempt to point out what I perceived to be contradictions in certain positions. For example, it became evident to me that the White students were much more comfortable in expressing racist views, especially toward recent immigrants, in the all-White group interview than in the individual interviews. Consequently, I offered an alternative view on several issues with the White students, such as how systemic racism operates to keep both African Americans and First Nations people oppressed.

It wasn't until the final 90-minute lecture/discussion, however, in which twenty-three of the twenty-five participants were in attendance, that I challenged some of the attitudes of intolerance that were common to the majority of students. For instance, to dispute the claim that Chinese people were causing havoc through their wealth, by receiving social assistance, or by criminal activities, I used statistics from Vancouver Sun newspaper articles to suggested otherwise (O'Neil, March 20, 1996; Ouston, November 2, 1996; and Rinehart, April 16, 1997). Another example I used pertained to the situations in El Salvador and Vietnam, including historical contexts for both, and why so many immigrants from those countries arrive in Canada with little money. The students appeared to receive these explanations without any problems.

Many of the students had made disparaging comments regarding First Nations people during both the individual and group interviews. Two things were very apparent: first, the bulk of this negativity seemed to originate with their parents and, secondly, there was very little understanding of the historical relations between Native
people and other, primarily White, people. I refrained from discussing this issue during the final all-group lecture because of potential embarrassment that some students, especially First Nations, might feel. But during both the Chinese/Vietnamese and White group interviews I offered an alternative view of the situation for Native people by pointing out the institutional racism inherent within Canadian society throughout our history. Residential schools, suffrage, land ownership, the banning of the potlatch and the Department of Indian Affairs' policy of assimilation were all touched upon. I cannot claim with certainty that my efforts lead to a more understanding view of Native people, but I do know that it was provocative enough to get at least some of the students to question their original attitudes.

I also wanted to explore how difficult it would be to get these working-class students to understand the implications of international free trade deals upon their own futures. By discussing aspects of NAFTA and national labour practices within each of the three countries involved, I was not surprised to see how quickly the students understood the ramifications upon their own lives and the lives of all working-class people, especially in Canada. It is obvious that a certain class awareness might develop out of this, one that I would hope progressive curriculum could encourage to cross ethnic lines. Moreover, it became apparent to me that with the proper information these students were much more likely to want to engage in the political process, to even get out and exercise their civic duty and vote during elections and referendums. Indeed, only a knowledgable electorate can become responsible citizens and create a democracy that has the common good as its goal, and not simply the good of those who have the most power in our society. After examining the social construction of young people's identities, I can only assume that if we can alter the environment or the social conditions to create a more compassionate atmosphere, we may find that our society will create a higher percentage of compassionate and responsible citizenry.
One classic example occurred that has given me hope that a type of conscientization (Freire, 1973) had taken place with at least one student. Generally, the Chinese students were the most emphatic in their opposition to curriculum reform and the most apathetic to the notion that societal change can occur. Indeed, Jennifer Tran was one of the most outspoken of these students, especially against the idea of teachers addressing the issue of wealth disparity in our society. In February, 1997, Jennifer left Spectrum to finish her high school degree at the Main Street Adult Learning Centre. Almost immediately, the provincial government announced cutbacks in subsidies for these adult education programs. Jennifer lead a student protest that included a petition with over four hundred student signatures that she delivered to her constituent MLA. Her position was that most of the students at the Main Street School are low-income Chinese adults trying to obtain their high school diploma who won't be able to further their education if the proposed cuts go through. She was partly successful in her efforts as the eventual cuts were less than originally stated. I include this anecdote here to point out that this student had changed her fundamental position: change can occur through political action or responsible citizenship can lead to fairer decisions to be made in the political arena. Jennifer claimed that she learned this, at least in part, from participating in the study the previous school year.

I utilized this final lecture/discussion that most of the participants attended to overcome the general lack of compassion toward the poor. I spoke of the 1920s and 1930s in North America. The following is a lengthy exchange that took place during this event, which was audiotaped:

PO: So many of you believe that it is the poor's fault that they are poor, right? [Many raise their hands]. And why do you think that?

Diane: Because they could go out and find a job if they wanted to.
Herb: Because they shouldn't have gotten into, like, drugs and drinkin' and stuff.

PO: All right. Why do you think that some people get so into drugs and alcohol?

Herb: They're bored.

Jason: They didn't come from a good, strong family.

Baljinder: Yeah. They were abused. Like, beaten up. Things like that.

Sandy: Yeah. And some are just too lazy.

PO: Okay. That's probably true for many of the street people who have drug or alcohol problems. Now let's look at the job situation. Do you feel that there is always a job if you want it in our society today?

Thao: You can always find a job if you look hard enough. It may not pay too good. But you can always get a job.

Jennifer: Yeah. A person may have to take two jobs.

Patrick: I don't think there are enough jobs for everybody now.

PO: Okay. Let's look at today's situation and compare it to an earlier time here in North America. Does anyone know what the 1920s were known as?...[silence]...The 1920s were known as the Roaring 20s....[Many say they've heard of this]...Now what are the 1930s known as?

Craig: The Dirty 30s. Cuz of the Depression, right?

PO: Yeah, that's right, Craig. There were a lot of unemployed people in the 1930s. So let's look at this. Most people were working during the Roaring 20s. And then lots of people are unemployed in the 1930s. What can we come up with here? All of a sudden, do you think many of the working people just became lazy and didn't want to work anymore?

Craig: No way! There was no work during the Depression.

PO: There was a lot less work, anyway. And it happened pretty fast. The Depression began with the stock market crash in October, 1929. Lots of companies lost a lot of money and had to lay off workers or even shut down. So lots of workers now had no jobs or income to feed their kids. Food banks started up. And lots of people who weren't as bad off were helping the unemployed.

Ronnie: Not like today.

PO: Well, there are people who try their best to help the street people today. Maybe not
as many people as there could be. But some people do. But back in the 1930s there were a lot of people who were calling the unemployed lazy and no good and things like that. They weren’t into helping them.

Craig: But there weren’t enough jobs for them.

PO: Right. And from where we are in history we can see that back then there was a serious shortage of jobs for people. We don’t see the unemployed back then as lazy. We usually see them as the unfortunate victims of an economy that turned bad. Really bad. How many have that impression of the 1930s?...[About half of them raise their hand]...Now, let’s compare that with today. Now the situation hasn’t been as quick to change as in October, 1929, when many companies were forced to close down within months of the stock market crash. It was easier to see this back then, right? Today the economy is slowing down at a much slower rate. Some of you have heard of the term “corporate downsizing”...[A few of them nod or say “Yeah”]...Every few months we hear this in the news, that a company is laying off several hundred or even thousands of their workers to save money or increase profits.

Baljinder: That’s right. So then there’s even more unemployed people.

Craig: They shouldn’t be allowed to do this. It’s not right. And then other people blame the people with no job.

Herb: Yeah. And they have to eat. So they get into, like, crime and stuff to get money for like food.

PO: Right. And we’ve then got a society that is less friendly than it was when more people were working because of all of this. As one of you said during the interviews, I think it was Baljinder: “No one chooses to be poor”. And I agree with that. People don’t want to look for food in dumpsters. Or sit on the sidewalk day after day asking us for a quarter. It’s just that they have no choice.

It was my intention to at least raise the question in each of the student’s minds to look at the street people in a different light. I also wanted them to be a little more sensitive to both the unemployed and the workers of our society. The general impression I was left with after this part of the lecture was that I was at least partially successful. I include it here as an example to demonstrate how certain changes to curriculum in the public education system may result in changes that could lead to a more tolerant and
understanding society. A tall order, but one that in my opinion is worth striving for. To paraphrase an old Chinese proverb:

If we don’t change direction we will eventually get to where we are heading.

It is the place we are heading toward, that of an intolerant and xenophobic society, that is a frightening image. The time has come to attempt to create a responsible citizenship, one that has as its main goal the best interests of the common person, regardless of ethnicity, social class, gender, age or sexual orientation. It is the responsibility of the public education system to do its part in this endeavour, as well.

RISKS WITH RESEARCH OF THIS TYPE

There is another component of White working-class angst in the Lower Mainland, one that is considerably more dangerous as it is located at the far right of the political spectrum. In my study, it is represented by Brian Campbell (a pseudonym), who did not participate formally. In September 1996 I first became aware of Brian’s obvious racist attitudes toward Chinese people. Discussions with him seemed to be going nowhere. In November, the *Vancouver Province* newspaper did a series on racism in the schools of the Lower Mainland. They did some coverage of this particular study, where I was quoted in a fairly ambiguous way supporting anti-racist curriculum rather than multicultural curriculum in order to encourage a more racially tolerant society (Ogilvie, *Vancouver Province*, Nov. 20, 1996, p. A23). Two days later, Brian quietly told me that both he and his mother were outraged by my “anti-White” sentiments. When I asked how my comments could be interpreted as anti-White, he said that it was his mother who read the article, not him. I suggested that she give me a call. Brian’s response was, “Don’t worry. You’ll be hearing about this, all right”. I’m not sure at this point
whether or not I was expecting a phone call from his mother. I never did receive one. Two weeks after this event, however, my vehicle was set on fire beyond recognition outside my home with what the authorities assume was gasoline. I only have my suspicions.

Toward the end of the same semester, in January 1997, Brian was reprimanded by the head teacher at Spectrum for his role in the physical attack of a small Chinese male student. As he saw me he went berserk, overturning desks and punching the wall of the portable. When I attempted to approach him, he repeatedly yelled out, “Don’t come near me, Paul. You are a fuckin’ traitor!” This series of violent behaviours lead to Brian’s eventual expulsion from the Spectrum program, one semester prior to his planned graduation date. This was a unanimous staff decision, backed entirely by the administration at Victoria Park, because physical violence cannot be tolerated on the school site. In a subsequent discussion, however, Brian told me that he felt I was responsible for being told to leave the program.

Brian and, apparently, his mother represent the fringe right associated with White supremacists. Some observers have commented that the downturn in the fortunes of the working class in the past decade or so, in both the U.S. and Canada, has resulted in an upswing in the emotional vitriol of the White supremacists and perhaps an increase in their membership (Cannon, 1993). In terms of the Spectrum student population, however, Brian was an anomaly; he was the only student that I have ever taught that I consider to be a White supremacist. The “traitor” label Brian applied to me represents the betrayal he felt I have committed because I don’t stand up for the rights of White people above others. To him and others like him, I am anti-White on these grounds, on the philosophy the newspaper quoted me on, that we should strive to be more tolerant of ethnic and racial differences. Brian was proud of his political position, often talking about his disdain for both Chinese and Black people. It is also
noteworthy, in terms of locating Brian's background, that he was a church-going Christian who openly despised the feminist position and expressed strong homophobic views. In other words, he espouses at least part of the New Right philosophy, albeit an extreme part. Once I realized the degree of extremism in this philosophy, it became obvious to me that there is a significant risk factor in doing research work of this kind. There is another part to this story, however, that I wish to tell even though it lacks the sensationalism of burning trucks and flying desks.

I recall an episode that occurred in January 1997 between Brian and myself a few days after his expulsion from Spectrum. It was exam time at the end of the semester and all students had left the school site for the day. I came into my classroom to find Brian sitting in the far corner, apparently waiting for me. The following conversation is a paraphrasing of our subsequent conversation:

Brian: So you were the one who told them to kick me out, weren't you?

PO: No I wasn't, Brian. It was a joint decision by the staff. We can't allow any violence at the school.

Brian: You told them about my feelings about Chinese people, didn't you?

PO: Many of the staff have heard you say your beliefs about Chinese people, about Black people, about Hitler many times since you first came to Spectrum. And you know how I feel about your beliefs. And we both know we disagree. I've always hoped that one day you'd see....[He interrupts me]

Brian: that everybody is the same, right?

PO: Well, perhaps. But we are different, too., as you know. But the concerns are the same, whether a person is a Chinese worker trying to raise a family, a Native worker trying to raise a family, or a White worker trying to raise a family. It's just that no one wants to raise their children in poverty. You don't. And I don't. And I feel that this should be our goal. Try to see that we all have the same fear and that we should work toward a situation where no one is poor.

[Brian sat in silence for a few moments].
Brian: Well, I disagree with you there. I think Chinese and Blacks and White people are all different from each other.

PO: But perhaps you won't a few years from now, Brian.

Brian: I doubt I'll change.
[I shrugged. A moment later he got up and left.]

I mention this anecdote for one point only: educators will not be able to end racism and other forms of oppression by themselves. However, they will always be able to "plant seeds", and maybe progressive changes in our society will appear in the future. I am not so naive to believe that I can change the White supremacist son of a White supremacist mother in one brief conversation. But it is still worth an attempt at planting a seed.

ON CURRICULUM and TEACHERS

One of the most obvious points to make about people and their social relations is that there are some important differences in the manner in which people see the world and apply meaning to their experience. One extremely influential factor in how people construct their world is their gender, as feminists have maintained for decades (at least). Another is their ethnicity, or cultural background, and the proponents of Canada's Multiculturalism policy have been successful in incorporating this into the public school curriculum. However, the 1991 Annual Report of the B.C. Ministry of Education stated that a survey of high school graduates one year out of high school showed that 50% claimed that "racial discrimination was a serious student problem. When asked if schools do a good job of promoting racial tolerance, almost 62% of the respondents either disagreed or were neutral" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1991, p. 186).
The question is, "If multiculturalism is not doing enough to lessen racial or ethnic tensions, what else can be done?"

In Canada, one of the least talked about of these "hidden" structures that work to have great influence on people's lives is a person's social class. If nothing else, this study demonstrates that there is a pressing need for the younger members of working-class families to have a greater understanding of their social location, to be better equipped to cast a critical eye on the social, political and economic forces that may not have their interests in mind. From the study, it is my contention that this understanding would not only benefit those working-class people, but society in general would be better off because of the emphasis on understanding of the Other. If the working class can be made to understand their oppression, then perhaps they will be able to understand other forms of oppression in our society, such as racism, sexism and homophobia. Anti-racist curriculum must include a class analysis component. As an educator in the Vancouver public school system, I feel it is more than a worthwhile goal for the school curriculum to address this need; it is the responsibility of the public school system to do so! The suggestions I make are either directly or indirectly based on the data and analysis of this study and have been put into Appendix 2.

There is not an anti-racist program that would have any measure of success in promoting ethnic tolerance if the teachers themselves do not understand the issues. Their must be a concerted effort to make teachers aware of the students' attitudes toward both race and racism. Moreover, the data revealed that many non-White students feel that they have had to deal with racist attitudes among their White teachers. Their descriptions seem to suggest that much of this originates out of systemic racism. This problem must be addressed. Similarly, teachers must be made aware of working-class concerns if they are expected to make their students aware of them. The school experience would most likely be a more rewarding experience for
the majority of these students if the curriculum was made more relevant to their own lives. Further, many working-class youth may be able to see the common concerns they have with the working-class youth of other ethnic groups. This is especially problematic because the vast majority of teachers understand society from a middle-class perspective. Issues of race, racism and social class should be addressed by both teacher certification programs and teacher professional development.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The general problem statement for this study was divided into two parts. Therefore, I have divided the conclusions in such a way that they correspond to each of these two parts. There is some overlap, however, as some of the conclusions are relevant to both parts of the general problem statement. The first set of conclusions are more likely to be seen as details that aid in the understanding of the social relations of the working-class participants in east Vancouver. The second set of conclusions are stronger statements of where problems reside in these social relations.

How do east Vancouver working-class youth locate themselves in terms of ethnicity and class? The data suggest in no uncertain terms that all of the participants were very aware of their ethnicity or race, while most of them were unclear about their social class. Except for the White students, virtually all of the others were made aware of their ethnic background during the early elementary school years. For many of these students, learning about their cultural history often came in the form of story-telling and demonstrations of ritual from family elders. The White youth, of course, learned much about their cultural history from the Eurocentric curriculum in the public school system, as well as from other institutions in our society. They were especially made aware of their whiteness, apparently, only after entering the large student populations of the
regular high schools of east Vancouver. This knowledge seems to have helped create an attitude of White defensiveness among these working-class adolescents, an attitude that seems to be based on a sense that they deserve privilege because of their white skin. Although white defensiveness includes some economic concerns, it obviously cannot cross racial lines and, consequently, serves to divide the working class, hindering a collective social movement in the process.

Almost all of the participants described a different set of social dynamics at work in the large high schools. It was much more difficult, for example, to make friends with someone outside of one's race, especially when compared to the situation in the elementary schools. Consequently, the school site is filled with groups of youth from the same racial background. The set of forces to explain this phenomenon are complex. Comfort levels, language, peer pressure and racist taunts are some of the factors involved that work to create the mosaic-like social field in the large high schools. Of course, there are many friendships that cross these boundaries. Quite often, commonalities such as a passion for sports or academics can assist in the creation of poly-ethnic friendships.

Almost all of the students saw themselves as middle class rather than working class. Because of this, they were unable to articulate many of their class concerns. Not only were they unable to articulate what free trade deals were, many of them expressed opinions that were detrimental to their well-being. Anti-government, fewer taxes, and reduced spending on social programs were common positions with many of the students. Most of the First Nations and Indo-Canadian students did not take these stances. In fact, the First Nations youth and one of the Vietnamese females were able to verbalize a connection between their ethnicity and their poverty. The Indo-Canadians showed the most class awareness, expressing disdain toward the corporate sector for, in their opinion, closing employment opportunities in the name of
profits. This did not translate, however, into a collective understanding or compassion for the poor.

All three of the Asian groups represented in the study described traditional hierarchical social systems that have had great impact on these cultures. They serve to let people know their social locations, which often seem to be ascribed rather than acquired. For instance, apparently in the Indian caste systems it is very difficult for people to experience upward mobility. On the other hand, the Chinese and Vietnamese female students expressed hope that they may one day rise within the hierarchy of their cultures through marriage. Significantly, all of the Asian females were the only participants opposed to school curriculum addressing economic inequality.

There is no question that ethnicity and class are crucial social divisions that serve to locate people within our stratified society. For these working-class youth, ethnicity is much more dominant in the construction of their own identities. The irony is that their social class is much more likely to determine their standard of living in the future.

Part 2 of the general problem statement was stated in the following terms: How do east Vancouver working-class youth perceive racism and economic inequality? The ethnic groups in this study appear to be in a state of flux, responding to rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions. In other words, this study is yet another to claim that culture is dynamic and not reified. This is an important point because of the inherent optimism: with favourable conditions, a more desirable society may emerge. At this point in time, unfortunately, all of the youth but one perceived that racism is on the rise in Vancouver. The general perception of the participants was that most racism emanates from the White population. All of the groups in the study, however, described experiences as both the victims and the perpetrators of racist attitudes. Perhaps this discrepancy is because most of them were only able to recognize blatant or overt
forms of racism. The First Nations students and I were of the opinion that their peoples have been burdened with the effects of racism more than any others.

There was a tendency among the students to personalize racism instead of comprehending its more covert forms and its far-reaching effects throughout society. The First Nations students were aware of both institutional and systemic forms of racism because of their own and their families' experiences. Many of the non-White participants, however, described subtle forms of systemic racism from a few White teachers, as well as the Eurocentric curriculum. Further, all of the students perceived racism to be a significant factor in their experiences at the large, regular high schools and almost negligible at Spectrum. I can only surmise that the small student population at Spectrum is the main reason for this. Unfortunately, in the current conservative economic climate, the financial resources required to revamp the large secondary schools into many smaller ones is highly improbable.

There were several examples in the data that suggest material concerns are often at the root of racist attitudes. White attitudes toward Asian immigrants and First Nations' land claims, Indian parents' discouragement of friendships with White youth, and Asian parents' opinion of Native people are some examples that seem to demonstrate that economic concerns and ethnic or racial prejudice are connected. There was also evidence for the converse, that is, racist attitudes would still exist with a good economy. The traditional Asian social hierarchies are one example. Myriad forms of White racism toward Native people in good economic times in B.C. also serve to demonstrate this. Further, by their own accounts, the most racist students described their parents having similar racist attitudes, while the most progressive students claimed that their parents held opinions of the Other similar to their own. This would suggest that an adolescent's parents are a very strong influence in shaping these perceptions. A few of the students were also aware of the effect of the media in these
There was an apparent lack of awareness of the economic structural forces that are working to limit the life chances of these working-class adolescents. In other words, their failure to identify with their social class served to increase ethnic tensions, even between the working class of two different ethnicities, rather than focus on the economic decisions of the corporate elite or those who have the most power in our society. The school curriculum has failed in preparing students to better understand the workings of our society, especially in explaining how power works.

Most of the students were of the opinion that poor people are to blame for their predicament. Some of them have some faith that meritocracy works in our society, partially explaining their attitude toward the poor. The First Nations students, however, had a complex view in which compassion and blame seemed to coexist, defining an attitude that served to motivate some of them while harbouring sympathetic feelings for the poor at the same time.

Gender interacts with both class and ethnicity to add layers of complexities on to the social relations. The apparent aversion of many of the Asian females to criticize the ruling class acts to hinder working-class solidarity. The social construction of some forms of working-class masculinity, particularly ones that present with an abundance of machismo, often work to escalate small confrontations into much bigger issues of race and racism. In this way they also mitigate bonding across ethnic lines and, therefore, work against the development of a working-class consciousness, at least among the youth.

There were signs of a political awareness forming in some of the participants. My teaching experience has made me firmly believe that educators have the opportunity to plant seeds in the minds of their students, seeds that may grow to fruition as a critical consciousness years later. This research also showed that there is a need for
curriculum to address the lack of attention to class inequality and its intersections with racism and sexism.

In its most condensed form, the summary of all of the findings of this study are as follows: Racism appears to be increasing, at least among the working-class youth of east Vancouver. Some racist attitudes are formed out of economic concerns that often are based upon confused reasoning. Much of the confused reasoning results from a lack of awareness of working-class issues. In this respect the public school system has failed. Consequently, ethnic and racial tensions increase among the working class, especially when the economy further oppresses their lives, as is the situation today. If curriculum reform could respond to these needs, an increase in awareness of working-class issues may lead to a greater understanding of the similarity in the needs of people from other ethnic backgrounds. This, of course, would only lead to a decrease in racism among the working class.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In order for students to be made aware of racist attitudes and social class concerns, it is obvious that their teachers must understand these concepts. Consequently, in my opinion there is a need for research to examine teachers' attitudes and knowledge on these issues. The next step would be to determine how best to decrease racist attitudes and how to increase a class analysis in the teachers themselves.

In terms of curriculum, there appear to be important gaps, even with the recent draft documents for Social Studies curriculum for grades 8 to 11 for researchers and educators to develop. (For further comments, refer to Appendix 2.) Furthermore, it is my contention that curriculum must do more to reflect the non-European cultures that make up the current B.C. population. Moreover, educators must develop curriculum
that incorporates social class issues and concerns so that students can be best prepared to comprehend both their own experience and to enter into public debates in a responsible manner. Almost the entire social studies curriculum and the vast majority of the teachers represent and reflect middle-class concerns. Somehow, the needs of working-class students must be addressed in order for the school experience to be much more meaningful for them. Some suggestions in this regard have been put into Appendix 2. I believe it would be beneficial to pilot a curriculum that includes these suggestions to determine whether student racist attitudes decrease as a result of heightened awareness of social class concerns.

This ethnography only studied small populations from five different racial or ethnic groups. Consequently, further studies should include other groups such as Filipinos, Latin Americans and Black people, as well as the groups in this study. An ethnographic study that focussed on White defensiveness, its connections with White supremacy, and working-class awareness may yield some valuable insights into how to thwart these potentially destructive social movements.

Gender, of course, needs to be incorporated into ethnographies such as this. The data made it quite clear that gender works in complex ways with ethnicity and social class in determining people's social locations. For example, it appears that certain forms of masculinity, particularly ones that promote "machismo" among the working class, are hindering a class awareness from developing across ethnic lines. This is an aspect of social relations that requires more research in the context of Vancouver so that curriculum reform can adequately address this problem. In order for curriculum to best present these social processes, intersections between all three of these structures would have to be better understood.
REFERENCES


Gray-Grant, Jennifer (Nov. 10, 1995). Education Leader 8, no. 18.


Government Documents:


APPENDIX 1

Questions for the Participants During the Individual Interviews

1. How would you describe your family background?

2. Who were the adults living with you while you were growing up? How was the money for the family brought into the household?

3. When was your first recollection that someone was from a much wealthier family than your own? How did this make you feel?

4. When was your first recollection that someone was from a much poorer family than your own? How did this make you feel?

5. What do you want to do after you graduate from high school? Do you think you will be able to do it? Why or why not? What made you decide to do this?

6. Ultimately what kind of a job would you like to obtain? Do you think you will be able to obtain this job? Why or why not?

7. How would you like your life to look ten years from now (your house, job, neighbourhood, etc.)? What do you really think it is going to look like?

8. How long have you lived in the neighbourhood that you have lived in the longest? How would you describe this neighbourhood? How would you describe the people who live in this neighbourhood?

9. How would you describe the ways your teachers, past and present, have addressed issues of wealth and poverty? How do you feel about this?

10. Have you ever felt that you have been treated differently because of the level of wealth you and your family have? (If yes) how so? How did this make you feel?

11. Are all of your friends from the same income bracket as you? (If not) how do they differ?

12. How would you describe your parents' views toward the wealthy? Toward the poor or homeless?

13. Do your parents have friends from different income groups? (If so) how do they differ?
14. Do you think that there is more or less animosity between the wealthy and the poor than before? Why? How does this make you feel?

15. Have you noticed a change in the kind of people moving into your neighbourhood? (If yes) how would you describe this change? How has this change made you feel?

16. When was your first recollection that someone was from a different race than you? How did this make you feel? Did it change the way you related to them? (If yes) how so?


18. Are all of your friends from the same racial or ethnic group as you? (If not) what other races or ethnic groups are they from?

19. Do your parents have friends from different races or ethnic groups? (If so) what other races or ethnic groups are they from?

20. How would you describe your parents' views toward people of other races?

21. Has the racial mix in your classrooms changed over the years? How has this made you feel?

22. How would you describe the ways your teachers, past and present, have addressed issues of race and racism? How did this make you feel?

23. Do you feel as though your teachers, past or present, have treated your classmates differently because of their race? (If yes) how would you describe this different treatment? How did this make you feel?

24. Would you have a romantic relationship with someone who is from a much wealthier background than you? Why or why not? How would your parents feel about this?

25. Would you have a romantic relationship with someone who is from a much poorer background than you? Why or why not? How would your parents feel about this?

26. Would you have a romantic relationship with someone from another race? Why or why not? How would your parents feel about this?

27. Do you think that racism is increasing or decreasing in Vancouver? Why? How does this make you feel?
APPENDIX 2

SUGGESTIONS for CURRICULUM REFORM

Utilizing the model for curriculum analysis put forth by John P. Miller and Wayne Seller in their book entitled *Curriculum: Perspectives and Practice* (1990), I will suggest changes within the B.C. Social Studies 8 to 11 curriculum which may help increase the level of tolerance for ethnic diversity. To begin, I'll do a brief overview of this 3-part model, each part reflecting a different philosophy about what schools should do and how students best learn. Miller and Seller have created a taxonomy of "positions", or orientations, in relation to curriculum: transmission, transaction and transformation. It is important to note that the goal of anti-racist education is to change the students in their attitudes toward the Other, to make them more tolerant of ethnic diversity. In other words, ideally the end result would have young people who have been "transformed" into an enlightened person without racist attitudes. The 3-part model in this context, however, refers to both teaching strategies and learning styles.

The first of these, the transmission position, has as its basic tenet that the function of education is "to transmit facts, skills, and values to students", with aspects of reality being thought of as separate from one another (pp.5-6). The typical picture most of us have in our minds of the common high school classroom in the 1950s is probably borne out of this position. In the transaction position, the goal is to encourage the student's intellectual abilities by having the student "reconstruct knowledge through the dialogue process" (pp. 7-8). Its focus is upon process, rather than content. Much of this orientation is based on the work of American philosopher, John Dewey, who held a general belief that rational intelligence would produce good citizenship skills that may create a better social environment for all. This philosophy of education has been
Miller and Seller refer to the third of these positions as transformation, one that has at its root the interconnectedness of all phenomena. It is often related to the philosophy of humanism. In this view, educators must have a critical view of the role of schools beyond simply reproducing the dominant economic ideologies of the day. In other words, the teacher should attempt to make the school the site of the "cutting edge of social and political change" (p. 8). This position requires that the educator be a politicized person with the ability to make connections to the social forces in our society, as well. In other words, in order for this perspective to be successful, the teacher must have some awareness of how power operates in our society. The suggestions I have for curriculum change come from each of these three positions, although I feel the transaction orientation may have the most to offer in terms of creating a more ethnically tolerant society.

Most school districts in Canada have made a commitment to incorporating multiculturalism into their curriculum. However, in recent years there has been much criticism from both sides of the "multiculturalism debate". Critics from the right have denounced multiculturalism from a similar perspective as those that tend to take a White defensiveness stand. At the same time, leftist commentary states that multicultural education has not done enough to ameliorate the social conditions for those at or near the bottom of our stratified society. For some of these critics, multicultural education is considered to be little more than "a piecemeal and fragmented" effort that does not benefit the common good, especially members of ethnic minorities (Banks, 1988, pp. 19-22). The eleven years I have spent as a teacher in the B.C. public education system has swayed me to this position, as well. As such, I encourage curricular reform to take a more anti-racist stance, rather than one that simply promotes multiculturalism. By anti-racist education, I refer to both pedagogy and curriculum that attempt to inculcate in each student the knowledge required for
understanding the mechanisms in which power works to oppress people in our society, people that are often part of a visible minority (but not necessarily). By promoting what Paulo Freire calls "conscientization", it is my desire that students will acquire the citizenship skills necessary to make sound, rational choices through the democratic process that will optimally lead to a better social environment for all (Freire, 1973). In this respect, anti-racist education relates most closely to what Ruth Frankenberg calls the discourse of "race-cognizance" (Frankenberg, 1993). In other words, powerful anti-racist curriculum should attempt to deconstruct ethnicity and class intersections in our society. In a Vancouver Sun article describing an anti-racism conference for high school students that took place in Burnaby, there was no mention of the inequities in wealth based on ethnicity. According to the newspaper, students in multicultural clubs have "tried to bridge the gap [between ethnic groups] by having cross-cultural events" (O'Neil, March 20, 1996, p. B1). Many of the suggestions that I make here are ones that attempt to fill in the gaps about social class and are based on the data from the study itself. Much of what I propose has been developed from what I perceive to be fundamentally lacking in the student's comprehension of the economic forces that are instrumental in shaping their lives. It is my opinion that this kind of awareness can only lead to greater self-esteem for the individual student as confusion is replaced by empowerment. However, I wish to point out that developing anti-racist curriculum was not the intent of this project. Therefore, I have not put forth any ideas regarding evaluation or matching content to both objectives and skills or any other aspects of curriculum development. Complete anti-racist programs have been developed in many other places.

There is no question that there is a place for the transmission position to impart knowledge to the students that will give them some historical context for why things are as they are in the Lower Mainland of B.C. today. For instance, many of the non-White
students felt slighted because the curriculum neglected the many contributions of people not from a European background in the making of Canadian society. This should be a major priority in curriculum reform and the transmission of historical facts and cultural values may prove to be an efficient way to do this. I also feel the students would be best served by the transmission position for the following topics:

i) Concerns of each social class:
- who benefits from corporate policies such as international free trade agreements?
- the creation of the welfare state and alternatives
- who benefits from social programs and in what ways?
  - a comparison between health-care systems in different countries
- the historical context for trade unionism and present-day issues
- the economic plight of sole mothers and the working-poor
  - subsidized national day-care programs
- statistics on the distribution of wealth in Canada
- forms and amounts of leisure for each social class

ii) Immigration
- demographical history in Canada and B.C.
- the federal government's perspective

iii) The White Supremacist Movement
- its history
- present-day issues
- the demographics involved
- comparison with the U.S., Europe and Australia
iv) Taxes:
- what they are used for
- the percentage that governments collect from profitable corporations and people in different social classes
- comparisons with other countries, especially western European social democracies

The manner in which content is presented is extremely important, particularly in today's multi-ethnic classroom. There was incredible resistance, particularly among the Chinese students, to the idea of teachers discussing the topic of wealth distribution in our society. B.C. MLA Jenny Kwan suggested that this topic should be presented to students from Asian backgrounds as a human rights issue. It is her contention that many of these students will be more attuned to understanding this topic if it is presented in terms of human rights because of their own histories. Ms. Kwan feels that many Chinese people do not see the unequal class location people are born into as a form of discrimination. This is but one example in which it is clear that the manner of presentation is of utmost importance in order to challenge existing attitudes toward the less fortunate in our society. It also points out the need for teachers to be both culturally sensitive toward all of the students in the classroom and have some understanding of present-day economic forces. As mentioned in chapter 2, Ken Osborne suggests, pedagogy, or "the way subject matter is selected, organized and presented to students", can be an excellent opportunity for both teachers and students to counteract the dominant ideology (Osborne, 1988, p. 21).

The emphasis in the transaction position is on fostering understanding of complex issues through dialogue with the objective of increasing citizenship skills. Some suggestions I have for curriculum reform seem best suited to be accomplished through teaching strategies within this orientation. These include the following:

i) Social Class and Values
- indicators of a person's social class besides material wealth
- the dominant ideology versus concerns of marginalized people
- the connection between meritocracy and privilege based on class, ethnicity and gender

ii) How Racism Works
- racist stereotypes
  - their formation and development
  - the effects
- types of racism and corresponding effects, especially examining systemic racism

iii) The Immigrant Experience
- historically in Canada
- present-day experiences from the student body in B.C.'s Lower Mainland
- democracy versus other political systems (could be presented by students)

The final position described by Miller and Seller, transformation, requires the student to be intrinsically motivated. It puts a focus upon the individual student's transformation. The goal here is for the student to undergo a profound change in attitude toward the Other. In other words, tolerance for diversity should be the objective of this part of the curriculum. The teacher is a facilitator only, guiding the students through topics that are based on their own experience. Topics to be addressed here might include the following:

i) The Multi-ethnic Community
- concerns of the different ethnic groups (as presented by the students)
- the social organization of the different ethnic groups, historically and today
- the role of women and men in the different ethnic groups
ii) How Power Works in Our Society

- student experiences describing oppression based on ethnicity, class, gender, etc.

The topics suggested above are only a small sample of what curriculum reform can look like. A set of participants from different ethnic backgrounds would undoubtedly have yielded different conclusions. I suspect, however, that perceptions of social class and the forces that act upon the working class in particular would have been at a similarly low level. Consequently, the suggestions offered here reflect this aspect of the students' lives.

One thing is certain, a lot more research is required before the B.C. Ministry of Education, Skills and Training can implement curriculum reform that addresses issues of social injustice within the cultures and social classes of the quickly transforming population of British Columbia's Lower Mainland. After looking over the Review Documents for Social Studies 8 to 10 (1996), however, I can see that there has been an attempt to address some of the issues that appeared in my research (B.C. Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1996). For instance, it is stated on the first page under "Curriculum Profile" that the changes that have been made attempt to emphasize "responsible citizenship", "reflective analysis of issues, ideas and events, viewed from multiple perspectives", and "increased content on Aboriginal culture and peoples". However, in the same column, the Ministry states that "there are few changes in the content focus" from the curriculum developed in 1985, leading me to believe that there is still ample opportunity for improvement. For instance, on page 24 of the Review Document, one of the Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Grade 9 Social Studies is as follows:

It is expected that students will:

- describe how identity is shaped by a variety of factors, including:
  - family, gender, belief systems, ethnicity, nationality
It is significant that social class was omitted from this list of influences in a person's identity construction. Even more troubling is the fact that there is not one mention of the all-important category of social class throughout the entire Review Document. Curriculum content must reflect the background of working-class youth and not solely those from middle-class families.

One of the major conclusions in my study is that racist attitudes are often fueled by anxiety about present and future economic prospects. Awareness of the struggles of the working class can only help to develop a sense of commonality across ethnic lines by emphasizing similar concerns rather than differences. Progressive school curriculum will have little effect upon our society's current adult population. However, it is my contention that a revised and more visionary curriculum, one that makes responsible citizenship as a central and worthwhile goal, will help to create a more tolerant atmosphere for our youth and eventually, the wider community.