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TO "BROWN IT UP" OR "BRING DOWN THE BROWN":
IDENTITY AND STRATEGY IN SECOND-GENERATION,
SOUTH ASIAN-CANADIAN YOUTH

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
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ABSTRACT

TO “BROWN IT UP” OR “BRING DOWN THE BROWN”:
IDENTITY AND STRATEGY IN SECOND-GENERATION,
SOUTH ASIAN-CANADIAN YOUTH

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Wilfrid Laurier University

Advisor:

Dr. Sarah Maiter

There is a growing body of research examining how ethnicity and race are implicated in identity development among ethno-racially diverse youth. Much of this research has focused on newcomer youth, resulting in a limited understanding of the particular challenges experienced by those who have spent the majority of their lives in multicultural Canada.

Furthermore, most of this research has portrayed identity as a static property, and youth as rather passive in the acquisition and expression of their identities.

The current study explored the complex and dynamic ways that racialized youth create and recreate identities within the various social environments they participate. Specifically, this dissertation presents findings from research looking at identity in second-generation, South Asian Canadians. A grounded theory approach, with a corresponding qualitative methodology, was used to understand the personal, social, and situated identities of 26 young South Asian Canadian women and men (aged 18-25). Results from in-depth interviews with participants suggest that these youth are influenced both by a distinct ethnic/racial history, and a personal history grounded in “Canadian” experiences. These identities are multidimensional, flexible constructs that are created and re-created as youth interact with others around them. Youth are experts in assessing a particular situation,

determining the most appropriate “self” to foreground from an array of identity choices, and executing expressions of identity that are likely to produce the outcome most in their favour.

Youth, then, actively negotiate various aspects of their environments and by drawing on their “identity capital”, make deliberate, strategic choices about whether to “do South Asian” or “do Canadian” within different human interactions. This reflects youths’ resiliency in dealing with the potentially oppressive situations that arise when living in ethnically/racially heterogeneous environments. The implications of these findings for social work research and therapeutic practice are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, significant changes to Canadian immigration policies have resulted in increased migration from non-European countries, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East, South and Central America, and the Caribbean (Foster, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2002). This influx of newcomers has transformed the ethno-racial composition of Canada, giving rise to what we commonly refer to as our “multicultural” society (Kelly & Trebilcock, 1998). With these shifting patterns of migration, there has been a corresponding growth in social science research that attempts to chart the societal and psychological consequences of immigration. Of special interest is the way people from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds perceive themselves. This issue is especially important when ethnicity and race are implicated in the development of identity during adolescence and young adulthood. The typical challenges that confront youth during these years (e.g., establishing autonomy from the family of origin, seeking both conformity and individuality within peer groups) may be particularly salient when one’s ethno-cultural background is different from mainstream North Americans¹.

Whereas research on the social, emotional, and psychological needs of *newcomer* youth is increasing (e.g., Anisef & Kilbride, 2003), aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., James, 1999; Tonks & Paranjpe, 1999a; Yon, 2000), little attention has been paid to experiences of ethnically and/or racially diverse adolescents and young adults who have spent the majority of their lives in Canada. The latter group is influenced both by a distinct ethnic/racial history as well as a personal history grounded in “Canadian”

¹ Throughout this text, the term “mainstream” or “majority” will be used to describe those from White, Euro-Western backgrounds, while the term “minority” will be used to denote those with diverse ethno-

experiences. As such, they may confront many of the same concerns as newcomer youth, but likely face *particular* challenges in constructing identities that simultaneously admit and resist elements of both their parents' and mainstream cultures. These experiences can have significant occupational, ideological, and relational implications for youths' adult lives, and as such merit meaningful exploration.

The overall goal of the present study was to understand identity in one ethno-racial group: South Asian-Canadian youth (between the ages 18-25) who have been raised entirely in Canada. A grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with a corresponding qualitative methodology (Patton, 2001) was used to answer research questions aimed at gaining a process-focused understanding of these youths' personal, social, and situated identities (Hewitt, 1991). Race, gender, and class (as the 3 primary ascribed statuses most often referred to in discussions of identity) (Dei, 1996), were used as entry points through which to understand these processes. A symbolic interactionist perspective, and the anti-oppressive social work framework provided the theoretical basis for this work. Specifically, this research was guided by the following assumptions:

- 1) **Identity is both stable and flexible.** While identity reflects some underlying stability, it is a complex, dynamic, and constantly shifting construct that is created through human interaction, differs across situations, and evolves over a lifetime;
- 2) **Identity is comprised of several expressions.** The ethno-racial portion of identity is one of many components that make up a person's identity. Each of these elements interacts with other aspects of identity, and are expressed differently depending on the context in which the interaction is taking place; and

cultural backgrounds. See the following section ("Definition of Key Terms") for a more detailed explanation of this term.

3) **Youth are active agents in the expression of identity.** Ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults actively negotiate different aspects of their environments, and make deliberate, strategic choices about how identities are expressed within human interactions. The way that identity is enacted reflects and reproduces social structures.

In this chapter, I begin by providing definitions of key terms used in the present research. I then discuss my own social location, and describe how this has shaped both my personal and professional interest in this topic area.

In Chapter Two, I describe the background to the issue being explored here. Specifically, I discuss the socio-political context in which this study is situated, and I review traditional and current research and theory related to identity in ethno-racially diverse youth. I then summarize the limitations of this body of literature, and provide a rationale for the present research.

In Chapter Three, I specify the research questions, and describe the theoretical underpinnings guiding this work. I then provide a detailed description of the methodology, including the grounded theory approach, and corresponding qualitative methodology used to study identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth.

In Chapter Four, I summarize the findings of this study. This chapter is organized according to each of the research questions listed in the previous chapter. Here, I present participants' descriptions of their identities as 1) multidimensional, with dimensions being related in many complex and meaningful ways; 2) reflecting flexibility and change, both across situations and over a lifetime; 3) continually evolving, based on the interaction between several key elements in youths' lives; and 4) expressed through an

active, strategic process of assessment, and a deliberate foregrounding of the most favourable “self” in any given situation.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of these findings with reference to the broader literature in this area. I describe various aspects of youths’ identities, and examine how these operate within multicultural Canada. I then draw on the notion of “interlocking oppressions” (Collins, 1990; Fellows & Razack, 1998), to explain the challenges faced by second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, and show how their use of “identity capital” (Côté & Levine, 2002), (as reflected in their ability to selectively “do Canadian” and “do South Asian”), is a helpful strategy used to manage these complex circumstances.

In the final chapter, I discuss the contributions of this work to both social work research and social work practice. I then summarize the limitations of this study, and conclude by suggesting some directions for future research.

Definition of Key Terms

In this section, I provide definitions for several key terms used in this research. Since each of these concepts can be defined in different ways both within and across different branches of the social sciences (Handa, 2003), what appears below is a description of how I have used each term in the present work. These linguistic choices reflect what I believe to be critical aspects of each concept, and therefore it is important to note that these definitions are limited by my particular biases and assumptions.

*Culture*²

In the present work, culture is understood as a set of ideals, norms, beliefs, and values that are shared by a group of individuals, and used to interpret and guide their actions in key areas of living (e.g., child rearing, family practices) (Haviland, 1996; Kim, 1998; Liebkind, 2001). Culture is not a stable, enduring set of rules that are simply passed on from generation to generation. Instead, culture constantly evolves through shared interactions between people and their surroundings (Choi, 2002). The products of these exchanges are common cultural codes that are dynamic, as they shift with changing circumstances and conditions (Hiller, 1991; Lee, 1999). Although the term culture implies a constancy of characteristics among a group of individuals, membership in a particular cultural group does not guarantee adherence to all of the values and customs of the group (Choi, 2002)³. Further, in societies where the co-existence of several different cultural groups is the norm, an individual may see her/himself as reflecting the values/customs of more than one group at a time.

*Race*⁴

Cultural groups are often created around the identification and attribution of meaning to similarities and differences that are attributed to one's race (Omi & Winant, 1994). In the present work, race is defined as the observable, physical features that are shared among several people, and that distinguish them from members of other groups

² While culture can refer to historical, national, or economic groupings (James, 1999), it will be used here with particular reference to classifications that evolve based on a common ethnicity and/or race.

³ For example, within the South Asian culture, there are numerous religious groups, each of which has its own set of beliefs and practices (e.g., Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, etc.). Therefore, while a "Hindu" and a "Muslim" might share certain, broader South Asian values (e.g., the importance of family, the emphasis on education), their specific religious practices may differ considerably.

⁴ Despite attempts to create discrete definitions of concepts like "race", "ethnicity", and "culture", such terms are often used interchangeably in everyday life (Gilkes, 2001), and indeed in the conversations with those who took part in the present study (see the Findings section for more details). Therefore, although

(Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000; Li, 1991). For example, if skin colour and hair texture are used as orienting features, individuals who are labelled as “Black” typically differ visibly from those identified as “Chinese”.

Grouping people according to shared physical traits is the process of racialization (Henry et al., 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994). Racialization is consistent with an essentialist view of race, which claims “that there is something biological that differentiates whites from other races...” (Pincus, 2006, p. 12). The process of racialization involves 1) identifying a need to divide people into different groups; 2) establishing some standard by which “they” are distinguished from “us”; and 3) developing laws, modes of discourse, and customs that reflect, sustain, and legitimate these group differences. Through this process, ideas about racial differences and the assumptions that are made based on these differences become mundane “realities” that operate in “commonsense ways” (Bannerji, 2000; Ng, 1997). Over time, “certain behaviours and modes of operation are eventually taken for granted; they become ways of excluding those who do not belong to the dominant group(s)...[This] commonsense thinking is uncritical, episodic, and disjointed, but it is also powerful *because* it is taken for granted” (Ng, 1997, p. 44, italics added).

In the United States, for example, in order to establish a “colour line” that rationalized and reinforced the practice of slavery, diverse groups of individuals originating from Africa (i.e., those with Ibo, Yoruba, and Fulani identities) were classified together as being “Black”. The physical differences between Blacks and Whites were distinguished, and these differences in skin tone/hair texture came to reflect one’s

these appear to be unique concepts as they are defined in this section, it should be understood that such terms are intertwined, and thus their relationship is less straightforward than is presented here.

level of societal power (i.e., Whites had a lot, Blacks had very little). By using these differences to substantiate the superiority of one race over the other, particular laws and customs (that favoured Whites, and denied human rights to Blacks) became entrenched in society. Racialization, then, was the process used to turn previously meaningless physical characteristics into critical indicators of who in society would hold power, and who would be restrained by that power (Omi & Winant, 1986).

As the above example shows, while colour differences might be biological in origin, *classifications* based on race are socially constructed (Bedard, 2000; Pincus, 2006). Typically, people in power tend to use racial differences to distinguish themselves from others, in order to serve their particular interests. These racial categorizations, then, are developed and reinforced through shared understandings of the meanings behind particular physical, observable attributes (Calliste, 1996; Dei, 1996; James, 1999; Tatum, 1997). Since power differentials shift over time, so do the groups who are racialized (Bedard, 2000; Perry, 2001). For example, “whereas descendents of...earlier European immigrants are now considered mainstream (e.g., Italians, Greeks) their ancestors confronted prejudice and discrimination comparable to that now facing Latino, Black, and Asian immigrants” (Stepick & Stepick, 2002).

Ethnicity

In the present work, ethnicity refers to a sense of “peoplehood” based on common descent, language, religion, and tradition (Choi, 2002). Members of ethnic groups are loosely organized along social, political and cultural dimensions in relation to this collective lineage (Ajrouch, 2000). Whereas racially, one might be labelled as “Black”, ethnically, s/he may identify her/himself as having, for example, African, Jamaican, or Caribbean roots. Each of these ethnic groupings has a set of associated values and

behavioural characteristics that differ substantially from others, despite the perceived common racial appearance of their members.

In many cases, members of seemingly related ethnic groups are combined, for convenience, to create a larger group (Lee, 1999). The related term panethnicity, then, is used to refer to an additional identity shared by members of each of these ethnic “subgroups”. For example, in the present study, individuals who identify themselves as Indian, Sri Lankan, and Pakistani are understood to share the panethnic label “South Asian”. In this way, people are classified not only by race or ethnic grouping, but based on the geographic roots of their ancestors as well.

Nationality

In the present study, the terms “nationality” or “national identification” will be used to describe participants’ sense of connection with a particular country or countries (i.e., “Canadian” or “Indian/South Asian”). Although the term “national” is a reference to geographic boundaries, national narratives are commonly used to distinguish people across ethnic, racial, and cultural lines (James, 1999), and function to establish a sense of cohesion among those sharing particular physical space (e.g., “Canadians” versus “Americans”) (Bedard, 2000).

Technically, identifying oneself nationally requires citizenship in a country, through either birth or naturalization. In this era of globalization, however, people feel comfortable defining themselves as having multiple national identifications, even if this is not recognized in an “official way” (Calgar, 1997). For example, here in Canada, the notion of multiculturalism supports a diversity of ethnic, racial, and cultural connections. Consistent with this, youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds often use “hyphenated” terms to communicate their nationality, reflecting the various

ethnic/racial/cultural associations that they experience (e.g., “Indo-Canadian” or “South Asian-Canadian”) (James, 1999; Mahtani, 2004; Tonks & Paranjpe, 1999b).

Ethno-Racial Group/Background

Given the range of possible meanings, and the lack of consistency in applying the terms “culture”, “race”, and “ethnicity”, I use the term “ethno-racial group” or “ethno-racial background” when referring generally to the experiences of young people with diverse roots. I have chosen to emphasize the notions of ethnicity and race, since 1) the group on whom I am choosing to focus (i.e., Canadian youth who share a South Asian background) is both ethnically and racially distinct, and 2) this is in keeping with other literature that suggests that describing one’s “ethno-racial” identity captures the varied subjective (e.g., beliefs, behaviours, norms) and objective identities (e.g., physical characteristics) and histories experienced by an individual (Romero & Roberts, 1998).

Second-Generation, South Asian-Canadian Youth

The participants in this study are referred to as second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth. The term “second-generation” is typically used to refer to youth who were born in North America, but whose parents (described as “first-generation” newcomers) originated from elsewhere (Perez & Padilla, 2000).

Similar to Handa (2003), I use the term “South Asian” to refer to those with a historical and cultural connection to the South Asian subcontinent (which includes India, Pakistan, Republic of Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh), as well as those who have migrated from the South Asian subcontinent to other countries (e.g., East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, the Caribbean, Fiji, etc.). The term “South Asian-Canadian” is used to describe the blending of both ethnic (i.e., ancestral roots in the South Asian

subcontinent) and national (i.e., Canadian, or American where appropriate) identities of these adolescents and young adults (Calgar, 1997; James, 1999; Mahtani, 2004).

The term “youth” is used to describe adolescents and young adults between the ages 18-25.

Mainstream/Majority and Minority Groups

In the present study, the term “mainstream” or “majority” is used to describe those from White, Euro-Western backgrounds, while the term “minority” is used to denote those from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds. Although it is arguable that given the increasing ethno-racial diversity in both Canada and the US those in “minority” groups outnumber those who are “mainstream”, Perry (2001) maintains that use of the term “mainstream” is appropriate since 1) political and economic power continues to remain in the hands of those who originate from a Euro-Western background, and 2) many of the core values of North American society (e.g., individualism, rationalism, personal responsibility, etc.) reflect a Euro-Western bias.

Locating the Author

My lived experience combined with my broad academic interests in the areas of multiculturalism and diversity have shown me the importance of looking at how Canadian society is responding to the growing ethno-racial variability in our communities. I believe that it is important not only to understand the general outcomes of living in this type of heterogeneous context, but also to recognize how this might affect, in particular, young people being raised in these environments. Given that adolescence and young adulthood are critical times for Canadian youth seeking to establish a coherent sense of self, I am interested in how living in multicultural settings might influence the

nature of this identity, especially when one's ethno-racial background is different from the mainstream.

My personal experiences as a South Asian-Canadian woman have, in part, informed my interest in this subject area. Specifically, having grown up in Canada's "multicultural" context with parents who were raised in Southern India has provided me with insight into some of the particular qualities of identity for youths whose ethno-racial roots differ from their mainstream counterparts. While I am conscious of the limits of my "in-group" knowledge, and understand that my experiences are not universal, I believe that possessing this situated or empathic knowledge (Hartman, 1994) provides me with a unique lens through which to investigate this topic.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this chapter is to provide the reader with an understanding of the socio-political and research contexts in which this study took place. I begin by describing the prevalent socio-political environment: Multicultural Canada. Here, I present a brief history of Canadian immigration and immigration-related policy⁵, and include an overview of South Asian immigration to this country. I then describe the ideology of “multiculturalism”, a core Canadian value that has emerged as a response to the growing ethno-racial diversity in this country.

This is followed by a review of current research that attempts to understand the social and psychological impacts of migration for the individual. I start with a short description of literature on acculturation, and then summarize theory and research related to identity, both generally and with specific reference to ethno-racially diverse youth. I conclude this section by identifying the limitations of this body of work, and describe how these gaps provided a starting point for the present study.

The Context: Multicultural Canada

Canada is often lauded as being a welcoming destination for immigrants, and a safe haven for refugees, with policies and practices designed to foster the growth of a diverse cultural mosaic. Indeed, our Multicultural Policy (1971) was developed, in part, to promote cultural diversity as an intrinsic component of Canada’s social, political, and

⁵ Despite the wealth of available information on the history of immigration and immigration-related policy in Canada, only a broad overview is presented here. Given that the focus of the present research is on youth between the ages of 18-25, I have traced Canada’s immigration history (and the relevant policies) up to the point at which most participants’ parents would have arrived in this country (i.e., the late 1960s through the 1970s).

moral order (Calliste & Dei, 2000). A review of the history of immigration in this country, however, reveals a less benevolent past in which politicians and decision-makers engaged in a constant struggle between trying to respond to Canada's economic and population growth needs, while managing a persistent, mainstream xenophobia of immigrants and refugees (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998).

A Brief History of Canadian Immigration Policy

Early in the 1900s, newcomers to Canada were sought to increase the labour pool and to build up the country (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). During this time, official policies were designed to support notions of who the “best” immigrants were (e.g., Germans, who were “solid and hardworking”), and exclude those who were less desirable (e.g., Asians, who were considered to be generally inferior to whites). The “Chinese Head Tax” (which was levied on each member of a Chinese household), and the “Continuous Journey Requirement”⁶, for example, were deliberate attempts on the part of those in power to legally restrict immigration from ethno-racially diverse individuals, whom they found morally or socially objectionable (Buchignani, Indra, & Strivastiva, 1985; Foster, 1998).

Prior to and continuing through World War II, immigration policies were designed according to the needs of business and industry, and were enforced based on economics and politics (Das Gupta, 1994; Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). For example,

⁶ The infamous Komagatu Maru incident is an example of how general xenophobia on the part of mainstream Canadians was officially supported by the country's court system (Naidoo, 1987). The Komagatu Maru was a boat commissioned by a wealthy Punjabi businessman to bring 376 prospective Punjabi immigrants to Canada. When arriving at the BC port, the vessel was denied entry, based on a regulation that allowed immigrants into Canada only if they arrived “from their country of birth or citizenship by a continuous journey on through tickets purchased before leaving the country” (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998, p. 146). This would be impossible, given the distance between Indian and Canadian ports. Since, as members of the British Commonwealth, South Asians could not be *explicitly* denied entry

although a head tax was imposed on all Chinese immigrants, their entrance into the country could not be entirely halted, as this would compromise trade with China. It was possible for the government to pursue such policies because many who held public office were also part of the corporate elite. During times of economic hardship, however, it was not these politicians/corporate bodies who were blamed; it was the immigrants who were said to have taken the jobs of “true Canadians”, causing unemployment and fiscal strife to befall members of the latter group.

Following the end of the war, and until the early 1960s, intense economic growth created a favourable environment for immigration (Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). Rather than encouraging newcomers for the purpose of agricultural development, professionals and those skilled in a particular trade were sought to populate urban environments. Finding the “right” kind of immigrant was still important to avoid social and economic problems, and there were efforts to keep Asians and others from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds, (as well as homosexuals, drug addicts and traffickers, Nazi-sympathizers, and communists) out of Canada. Explicitly racist policies, however, were no longer tolerated, and various ethnic and racial groups were invited to work with government to determine how best to manage and support immigration from non-white countries.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, the decline in natural population growth and a rising need for skilled labour in technology and industry prompted an increased need for immigration (George, 2003; Isajiw, 1999). At this time, in response to widespread acknowledgement of the discriminatory practices of the past, new regulations were introduced to eliminate race as a determining factor in immigration decisions, and

into Canada, regulations such as the “continuous journey requirement”, could protect mainstream Canadians from “dark-skinned” foreigners.

“the (Points System) was introduced to bring justice and fairness to the immigration process, as well as to meet the (economic and labour) needs of the country” (George, 2003, p. 149).

Within the Points System, specific characteristics were accorded a particular number of “merit points”. The greater the number of “merit points” one accumulated, the greater the likelihood that s/he would be granted immigration to Canada. Qualities under consideration included education and training; personal qualities (e.g., adaptability, motivation, initiative); demand for the person’s occupation in Canada; level of skill; the extent to which employment is already arranged; knowledge of English and/or French; the number of relatives already living in Canada; and the number of employment opportunities in their desired destination (George, 2003). In addition to making the immigration process more transparent, less racist, and less subjective, the introduction of the Points System, prompted the arrival of the greatest number of non-white immigrants (i.e., from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, South and Central America, and the Caribbean), in Canada’s history (Foster, 1998; George, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2002).

South Asian Immigration to Canada

It is during this time that South Asian immigration to Canada reached an all-time high. Although immigration from South Asia (most notably from the northern region of Punjab) occurred to lesser degrees in previous decades, the removal of discriminatory immigration practices through the introduction of the Points System encouraged many more South Asians to migrate to Canada (Buchignani et al., 1985; Ramcharan, 1984). As the South Asian community grew in Canada, it became increasingly complex and heterogeneous, with Sikh “pioneers” (many of whom came to Canada as manual

labourers), now being joined by newcomers with diverse religious and geographical roots from throughout the Indian sub-continent (Buchignani et al., 1985; Das Gupta, 1994).

Most immigrants from South Asia at this time were well-educated professionals who were seeking not to escape impoverished conditions, but rather to move towards progress and opportunity in the West. For South Asians entering Canada under the Points System, migration was seen as “a mode of advancement for certain aspirant groups who *already* (had) a particular social identity that (made) emigration a viable option” (Bagley, 1987, p. 15, italics added). This wave of South Asian immigration, during which approximately 100,000 individuals arrived in Canada, lasted from about 1967-1975 (Ramcharan, 1984), and was followed by the arrival of Ugandan-Asian refugees admitted to Canada on humanitarian grounds in the early 1970s, and South Asians from the subcontinent and elsewhere (i.e., secondary migrants) who entered Canada in the late 1970s with the shift in labour requirements from white collar to blue collar skills (Naidoo, 1987).

Canada's Multicultural Policy (1971)

Canadian immigration policies have always, and continue to be shaped by economics, and linked to considerations around labour requirements and levels of population growth (Das Gupta, 1994; George, 2003; Isajiw, 1999; Kelley & Trebilcock, 1998). Although newcomers, including those from non-traditional source countries, are necessary to support the fiscal and political viability of the nation, there are notable, negative social outcomes that accompany the creation of ethnically/racially heterogeneous social spaces. Indeed, according to Ramcharan (1984), “...when there is a need for labour, immigrants are welcomed; when there is high unemployment,

immigrants are blamed for it, and made the scapegoats, with South Asian and other racial minorities the most visible scapegoats” (p. 35).

In an attempt to manage these mixed consequences of Canada’s growing ethno-racial diversity, the Canadian Multicultural Policy (1971) was introduced. The overall goal of this policy was to diffuse potential problems by reframing ethnic/racial difference as a national agenda of “unity within diversity” (Mahanti, 2004). Its chief purposes were first communicated by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in the House of Commons, in October of 1971 as follows:

1. To assist all Canadian cultural groups that demonstrate a desire and effort to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada;
2. To assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society;
3. To promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity; and
4. To continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada’s official languages, in order to become full participants in society.

This official commitment to multiculturalism and the general acceptance of diversity are viewed as practices that are uniquely Canadian, and which have set us apart from other nations around the world (Bedard, 2000). Indeed, according to Kelley & Trebilcock (1998), a common sentiment among Canadians is that “racism and bigotry were European, or at least American, inventions that have little part in Canada’s history, tradition, or psyche...Canada has a long history of welcoming refugees and dissidents...”

(p. 441). According to the Department of Canadian Heritage's statement on multiculturalism, this value is

... fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures. The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence.

(http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/respect_e.cfm)

The reasons underlying the development of the Canadian Multicultural Policy (1971) and the extent to which its goals are actually realized in the day-to-day lives of Canadians have been widely debated in both academic texts and popular literature (e.g., Bannerji, 2000; Bissoondath, 1994; Hiebert, 2003)⁷. This official policy, however, continues to provide the social script for how Canadians should manage its growing ethno-racial diversity, serving as the only acceptable "norm" for behaviour in Canadian culture.

A Review of Current Research Literature

With the changing patterns of migration and the emergence of policies that support them described above, there has been a steady increase in social science research that attempts to understand the societal and psychological effects of immigration. Much of the research in this area focuses specifically on the process of acculturation.

Acculturation is the study of changes that occur at both individual and population levels when two or more cultural groups come into continuous first-hand contact (Berry, 1990; Redfield, Lincoln, & Herksovitz, 1936). According to Berry (1990, 2003), "population acculturation" comprises the ecological, social, and institutional shifts that

take place when host and incoming cultural groups come into prolonged contact with one another, while “psychological acculturation” takes place within the individual as a result of her/his interaction with a culture that differs from her/his own ethno-cultural group.

Activities at the population-level create behavioural and value-based changes at the level of the individual. Studies of acculturation focus to a great extent on the varying degrees to which each ethno-racial group expresses inclinations towards either “cultural maintenance” (i.e., the extent to which people value and work to maintain their ethnic/racial identity and behaviours) or “contact-participation” (i.e., how much group members seek out contact with and wish to participate in the daily life of the larger society) (Berry, 1999). A group’s tendency towards either cultural maintenance or contact-participation is key in determining which of four major acculturation outcomes an individual will experience: “assimilation”, “separation”, “integration”, or “marginalization” (Berry, 1990, 1999).

“Assimilation” is the typical outcome for group members who favour high levels of daily interaction with those in the larger society at the expense of maintaining various aspects of their ethnicity/race or culture of origin. Conversely, when value is placed on retaining one’s original ethnicity/race or culture and avoiding interaction with others, the effect is “separation”. The third potential outcome, “integration”, occurs when group members express interest in both maintaining aspects of their original culture, as well as interacting with those in the larger society. Finally, “marginalization” results from low levels of interest in either cultural maintenance or contact-participation. For these individuals, who tend to exist on the fringes of society for a variety of reasons that may be unrelated to ethnicity and/or culture, psychological comfort and positive social

⁷ This debate will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5, the Discussion section.

interactions are absent in both their particular ethno-cultural group, as well as within the larger society.⁸

Regardless of the outcome, the process of acculturation requires important adjustments that have a permanent impact on the individual's identity (Goodenow & Espin, 1993). Further, such experiences and their effects become increasingly significant when they take place during adolescence/young adulthood, a critical period in shaping a person's identity. Indeed, given the "contextual and relational nature of identities, and...the various players and events that contribute to the process of becoming...(youths') negotiation of identities (vary) within situational and historical constraints and contexts" (James, 2001, p. 3). It is clear, therefore, that migration and the consequences of this process can have important effects on the identities of young people with diverse ethno-racial roots. In response to the need for more complete frameworks that describe identity development in these youth, a growing body of research has emerged.

This literature is reviewed in the sections that follow. Specifically, I describe current research in the area of identity formation and expression in ethno-racially diverse youth living in North America^{9,10}. In doing so, I draw from the fields of social work,

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of John Berry's work on acculturation and its outcomes, see: Berry, J. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin, (Eds.), Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research (pp. 17-38). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

⁹ The research and theory described here, in many cases, portrays *all* adolescents from different ethno-racial backgrounds as a homogeneous group. It is often implied that the findings of a study focused on identity formation in a particular ethno-cultural group are applicable to everyone who has diverse ethno-cultural roots (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000). While the underlying processes of identity development can be similar for individuals, we cannot assume that the expressions and outcomes of this identity are shared both across, and even within different ethno-racial categorizations.

¹⁰ The research and theory described here is primarily related to the experiences of individuals whose parents emigrated from locations *outside of* North America. Although similar to other ethno-racially

psychology, sociology, and anthropology, where these topics are best described. By integrating the research and theory found in these main academic areas, I provide the reader with a review that approaches this subject matter from different, complementary perspectives, and captures the individual, social, and relational aspects of identity formation and expression.

I begin by providing a brief definition of the concept of identity. I then trace the evolution of research in this area, starting with general models that attempt to explain how identity develops and is expressed in adolescents and young adults. I follow this with a review of more focused research on the formation and expression of identity in youth with diverse ethno-racial roots, by introducing the constructs of ethnic identity and bicultural identity. I then discuss the limitations of this body of work, and describe how the gaps described here will be the starting point from which to begin to explore notions of identity in one particular group of ethno-racially diverse youth: second generation, South Asian-Canadians who have grown up entirely within the Canadian context.

Defining Identity

Most generally, identity has been referred to as “an internalized, self-selected regulatory system that represents an organized and integrated psychic structure (requiring a) distinction between the inner self and the outer social world” (Adams, 1992, p. 1). At the level of the individual, identity is understood as the way a person sees her/himself as separate from the outside world. A second component of identity involves how this perceived “self” behaves and interacts with the outside world. This “social” aspect of

diverse youth with regard to their non-White heritage and their distinct identities relative to the majority (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000), Native Canadian/American youth have had historical experiences that are beyond the scope of the proposed work. Given the experiential and qualitative differences between those who have migrated *to* North America versus those who have been marginalized by newer arrivals, I will limit my focus to issues related to the experiences of members of the former group.

identity requires that we attend to “group-based aspects of an individual’s self-definition, derived from membership in and identification with social groups” (Baron, Byrne, & Watson, 2001, p. 136) when looking at identity. The added effect of others on the development of identity points to the importance of a young person’s community, family, school environment, and peer group in shaping perceptions of self (James, 1999).

Together, these traditional definitions of identity have provided the basis for most research focusing on identity formation and expression in youth both generally, and specifically in those with diverse ethno-racial roots.

General Models of Identity Formation/Expression in Youth

According to most traditional research, identity is the result of an active process of reflection that takes place from ages 12 or 13 through to young adulthood. Given the occupational, ideological, and relational implications of one’s identity for her/his adult life, much effort has been spent trying to describe its development. A variety of approaches, including psychoanalytic (e.g., Freud, 1958), neoanalytic (e.g., Blos, 1967), and family/lifespan theories (e.g., Youniss & Smollar, 1985) have enjoyed popularity among particular audiences. The theories most helpful in providing a basis for understanding identity in ethno-racially diverse youth are the developmental theory, social identity theory, and the ecological framework.

Each approach identifies particular elements of a person’s world as the primary force in shaping her/his identity. The developmental theory, for example, highlights the role of the individual and her/his personal agency in determining the nature of identity (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Patterson, Sochting, & Marcia, 1992). Social identity theory expands to include a focus on others who share membership in particular social groups in influencing a person’s identity. Here, an individual’s relationships and

interactions with members of her/his social group are seen as playing a critical role in affecting the characteristics of identity (e.g., Germain, 1998; Rummens, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981). Finally, in addition to discussing the role of both the individual and her/his social relationships in identity formation, the ecological systems framework stresses the impact of other contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Mahoney, 1975; Cunningham & Spencer, 2000). This includes different features of a person's surrounding environment, including social structures and institutions.

The developmental theory, social identity theory, and the ecological systems framework, when taken together, are helpful in describing how a range of factors intersects to produce particular identities. These perspectives, however, are rooted in Euro-Western understandings of identity that have been based on the experiences of (primarily) White, male youth living and growing in relatively homogeneous settings (Cunningham & Spencer, 2000; Portes, Dunham, & Castillo, 2000; Saraswathi, 1999; Wong, 2001). Such models are less useful when attempting to capture identity formation and expression in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults living in ethnically/racially heterogeneous environments (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Given the increased ethno-racial diversity that has come to characterize North American communities, there has been a growing body of research that focuses on the unique aspects of identity formation and expression in ethno-racially diverse youth.

Ethnicity, Race, and Identity Formation/Expression in Youth

A key factor in the formation and expression of identity in youth are the familial and social contexts within which they exist (Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999; Montemayor, 2000). For adolescents and young adults from diverse ethno-racial

backgrounds, then, identity can be influenced to a great degree by their membership in distinct ethnic/racial groups. Indeed, Phinney & Rosenthal (1992) describe the experience of youth from ethnic/racial minority groups as different from their mainstream counterparts, since the latter may confront issues like prejudice, discrimination, and structural barriers. Such experiences can have a critical impact on the way one sees her/himself. Therefore, alternative conceptualizations of identity have emerged to capture these experiences in ethno-racially diverse youth. Current literature that focuses on identity development and expression in ethno-racially diverse youth living in North America in two main ways: either as “ethnic” identity, or as “bicultural identity”.

Ethnic Identity

Early studies of the role of ethnicity/race in the formation and expression of identity in youth have focused on the notion of “ethnic identity”. Ethnic identity is thought to be the part of a person’s overall identity that is linked directly to her/his ethno-racial roots, and includes a sense of shared characteristics, customs, and practices between members of similar ethno-racial backgrounds (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). Some researchers highlight the psychological nature of ethnic identity (e.g., Phinney, 1990). Here, a person can experience her/his ethnic identity by simply acknowledging shared ethnic/racial and cultural roots without interacting with in-group members. Others, however, suggest that ethnic identity can only be created and defined by engaging in meaningful interactions with members of the same ethno-racial/cultural community (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000). In either case, a person’s ethnic identity is critically linked to establishing a positive self-concept and well-being (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992).

Research on ethnic identity typically has two goals: 1) to describe how ethnic identity develops in ethno-racially diverse youth, and 2) to review the potential outcomes from having either a strong or weak ethnic identity.

Factors influencing the formation of ethnic identity.

The formation of ethnic identity is typically explained by drawing from the three general models described in the previous section. For example, developmentalists highlight the role of the individual by discussing models of ethnic identity formation that emphasize internal exploration and struggle (e.g., Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). Here, a person moves from a stage of “unexamined ethnic identity”, through a period of struggle (i.e., the “exploration” stage), towards “resolution” where s/he has a secure, stable sense of ethnic identity.

Alternatively, social psychologists and social identity theorists see ethnic identity as emerging from membership in a social group, and discuss how relationships with others play a key role in ethnic identity formation (e.g., Baron et al, 2001; Tajfel, 1981). Interactions with in-group members are key factors in shaping this portion of identity. For example, as a person’s first point of contact, the attitudes and behaviours of parents have been found to influence the strength of identification with ethno-racial background in South Asian-American (Farver, Bhadha, & Narang, 2002), and African-American and Cuban American youth (Laursen & Williams, 2002). Also, social relationships with co-ethnics outside of the immediate family have been linked with ethnic identity development in Lebanese-American (Ajrouch, 2000), Italian-Canadian (Cameron & Lalonde, 1994), and black youth (Waters, 1994). Typically, when these interactions

reflect positive perceptions of group membership, youth develop a strong ethnic identity, while negative views of group membership lead to a weak ethnic identity.

Finally, others adopting an ecological orientation emphasize the way the larger social system (i.e., including institutions like education, health, etc.), and the events and encounters in these surroundings in impacting a person's ethnic self. For example, mainstream views about ethno-racial diversity in general, as well as dominant beliefs about specific ethno-racial groups are seen as influencing the formation of ethnic identity in diverse youth (Lee, 1999). A strong ethnic identity can be expected to develop in cases where the majority holds extreme views about various ethno-racial groups, whether these are highly favourable or unfavourable (Germain, 1994).

Outcomes related to ethnic identity.

Consistent with recent trends towards isolating factors that either place youth at risk, or protect them from experiencing undesirable circumstances (e.g., Rutter, 2003), work in the area of ethnic identity has sought to understand how this variable can contribute to, or buffer against specific behaviours or mental health outcomes.

Studies on the association of ethnic identity with particular behavioural outcomes have focused mostly on drug use among youth. This research has yielded mixed findings, with some studies suggesting that a strong ethnic identity places youth at risk for increased drug use (e.g., James, Kim, & Armijo, 2000), while others describe a strong ethnic identity as a protective factor that helps youth avoid taking part in drug-related activities (e.g., Scheier, Botvin, Diaz, and Ilfill-Williams, 1997).

Research looking at the relationship between ethnic identity and mental health has focused on whether a strong ethnic identity serves to protect ethno-racially diverse youth,

or place them at risk for developing clinical disorders and/or esteem issues. Again, the findings from these studies are contradictory. For example, Wong (2001) found that in Asian-American youth who are already at risk (i.e., based on their low socio-economic status) for developing clinical depression, having a strong ethnic identity served to contribute further to the development of a depressive disorder. Conversely, others have found that a strong ethnic identity might buffer ethno-racially diverse youth from negative mental health outcomes. Studies with African-American (e.g., Constantine, Donnelly, and Myers, 2002) and Japanese-American (e.g., Williams, et al., 2002) populations suggest that if a young person has a strong ethnic identity, s/he is more likely to cope with stressors by drawing support (i.e., instrumental, emotional, or spiritual) from their ethno-racial group. A strong ethnic identity, then, creates opportunities to interact with and draw support from co-ethnics, which is assumed to protect youth from experiencing mental/emotional difficulties (e.g., anxiety, esteem issues, etc.).

Limitations of the ethnic identity construct.

Research on ethnic identity has been instrumental in expanding the scope of traditional, more general models of identity development in youth. This notion of a discrete “ethnic identity”, however, is an overly simplistic attempt to understand how ethnicity/race is implicated in identity formation and expression in youth. For example, weak identification with one’s ethnic group (i.e., low ethnic identity) is assumed to reflect a strong association with the dominant culture, and conversely, intense identification with co-ethnics (i.e., high ethnic identity) is understood as existing at the expense of deep connections with those in mainstream society. Further, depending on the particular study, having a strong (or weak) ethnic identity is expected to lead to behaviour X or outcome

Y, which may or may not be positive. According to this research, youths' ethnic identities appear independent and fixed over time and across changing life circumstances.

To attempt to address these concerns, the current trend among researchers working to understand the implications of ethnicity/race for identity in youth is to emphasize the "bicultural" nature of these processes. In particular, these studies include an expanded methodology aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of these issues, and suggest a two-dimensional process of identity formation, where strong identification with one's ethnic group need not imply a weak relationship with the mainstream culture and vice versa.

Bicultural Identity

According to Montemayor (2000), youth from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds, in coping with a sense of being "caught between two worlds" (i.e., the ethnic/racial group to which they belong and the larger, dominant society), often develop a bicultural identity. This involves maintaining ties to their culture of origin, while simultaneously adopting the norms prevalent in the majority culture. Phinney & Rosenthal (1992) and Lu (2001) suggest that although research on ethnic identity implies that the individual makes a choice between the norms and values of her/his ethno-racial background, and those of the mainstream population, youth can maintain ties with *both* groups, to varying degrees. Adopting a "bicultural identity" may be particularly beneficial to youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds, since having two cultures from which to draw information about norms, values, traditions, etc. can involve taking the best from both worlds (Centrie, 2000; James, 1999).

Research on bicultural identity appears to have two main goals: 1) to understand the formation of bicultural identity (including the various factors implicated in its

development), and 2) to outline the potential outcomes of maintaining a bicultural identity.

Factors influencing the formation of bicultural identity.

Research in the area of bicultural identity is still quite new. Whereas several models of ethnic identity formation have been developed, only one complete model of bicultural identity formation presently exists. Garrett's (1996) 5-stage model of bicultural identity formation¹¹ blends aspects of a developmental model, social identity theory, and the ecological framework. According to this researcher, biculturalism is fluid and malleable. A bicultural identity changes over time, is shaped by different environmental conditions, and emerges through interactions with others in particular situations. Progressing through each of the stages involves moving towards a whole identity in which the two worlds a young person simultaneously inhabits are bridged. While this journey may appear to be smooth and linear, at points, this process is typically characterized by stress and confusion.

Different factors can affect bicultural identity formation. The family environment is an important influence on the development of a bicultural identity. For example, families where parents exhibit an integrated style of acculturation are more likely to be associated with youth who exhibit a bicultural orientation, since, like their parents, these adolescents are encouraged to interact with both home and mainstream cultures, and experience rewards when doing so (e.g., Farver, et al., 2002). Beyond the family system, perceptions of the mainstream society can also affect whether or not youth develop a

¹¹ This framework (which emerged from interviews with an Aboriginal elder) is based on the experiences of, and designed to explain bicultural identity formation specifically in Aboriginal youth. It may, however, be helpful in understanding bicultural identity development in other youth with diverse ethno-racial roots.

bicultural orientation. According to Handa (2003), if the dominant culture communicates (whether overtly or subtly) a need for newcomers to assimilate, conform, and assume a national identity, youth are more likely to resist adopting biculturality. Instead, young people may either retain a strong ethnic identification as an act of defiance against the majority, or succumb to these larger pressures and favour identification with mainstream society.

Outcomes related to bicultural identity.

Much of the research looking at bicultural identity focuses on its related outcomes. Once again, similar to studies focusing on the outcomes associated with ethnic identity, bicultural identity is conceptualised in terms of its potential as either a protective or risk factor.

A strong bicultural identity is assumed to lead to “bicultural competence”. This is a positive state achieved by youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds, where value characteristics from both the mainstream and the culture of origin are selectively adopted based on what is most appropriate for youths’ needs and circumstances (Goodenow & Espin, 1993; Lew, Allen, Papouchis, & Ritzler, 1998). For example, Lew et al., (1998) found that Asian-American youth were able to take collectivist aspects from their culture origin, and individualistic aspects from the American culture in order to develop healthy ideas related to achievement and failure. Goodenow & Espin (1993) showed that bicultural competency allowed young women who had immigrated to the United States from Latin America, to successfully negotiate sex-role discrepancies between their culture of origin and the dominant society. These young women were able to experience the “best of both worlds”, as they actively integrated new customs and retained old

traditions to create a self-assured bicultural identity capable of handling challenges posed by either culture.

In some instances, however, biculturalism can have potentially negative outcomes. Kanno (2000), for example, found that achieving/maintaining a bicultural identity placed Japanese-American youth at risk for developing mental health issues, since this led to adjustment problems, and feelings of ambivalence around cultural and ethnic allegiances. This feeling of not truly being rooted in one culture or the other is consistent with research on Mexican-American youth (Rodriguez, Ramirez, & Korman, 1999). In this instance, being “in-between” their culture of origin (i.e., Mexican) and the mainstream American culture led to the development of both mental health symptoms and compromised family relationships.

Limitations of the bicultural identity construct.

The bicultural construct expands upon previous understandings of the role of ethnicity/race in identity formation in youth. Instead of seeing the person as being influenced to a greater degree by one culture *or* the other, the notion of a bicultural identity allows for one’s sense of self to be shaped by *both* the larger, mainstream society, as well as her/his particular ethno-racial background. The concept of biculturalism is also helpful in acknowledging that youth do not live in a vacuum where there is a consistent emphasis on one culture over the other. Rather, youth construct their identities by drawing from their particular ethno-racial or cultural group, as well as their broader surroundings. Indeed, Kibria (1997) suggests that in developing a bicultural identity, people apply values from each culture differentially to various aspects of their lives.

Although bicultural identity is seen as more fluid and dynamic than ethnic identity, current research and theory in this area remain focused on how youth manage discrepancies related specifically to ethnicity/race between home and mainstream cultures. The role of other, perhaps critical aspects of youths' environments (e.g., gender, class), and how these might be implicated in identity formation/expression are overlooked. It is unclear, then, how membership in other, broad social and cultural groups might intersect with ethnicity/race in both the formation and expression of youths' identities.

Limitations of Current Research Literature

Much of the research described above adopts a particular view of identity (both generally as well as for youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds) as a relatively stable, fixed construct that can be objectively understood. Such studies are typically rooted in stage-like models of identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Patterson, Sochting, & Marcia, 1992; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1990) that see adolescence (and young adulthood) as the critical time during which one's identity becomes established and coherent, and remains constant throughout one's lifetime.

More recently, however, writers and theorists articulate a more fluid, dynamic, and shifting view of identity (e.g., Razack, 2003) that challenges this fixed, static view. For example, postmodern approaches tend to view identity as a relational process that is artificially constructed to create imagined boundaries separating "us" from "them" (Gergen, 2000). These categorizations reflect the prevalent socio-political environment, and since they are socially constructed, our views of self shift with changing circumstances. In addition, identity is seen as changing based on our interactions with

others, and is something people “do” in particular situations, rather than a construct or attribute we possess (Côté & Levine, 2002).

These newer understandings of identity are particularly important when considering the identity in youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds, since fixed notions of identity both reflect and work to sustain inequalities based on race (Bannerji, 1995; Bhabha, 1994; Fulani, 2000; Gilroy, 2004). Specifically, rigid, stable conceptualizations of identity have particular consequences for “raced” subjects, since through these identifications, they are “essentialized, unified, or totalized as cultural entities (i.e., they undergo reification, with specifically ascribed meanings produced through the colonial definitions of the other)” (Bannerji, 1995, p. 26). In other words, viewing identity as a fixed and static object works to homogenize those who are racialized, and invokes stereotypical, negative definitions of individuals with diverse ethno-racial roots. It is important, then, to work towards recognizing identity as a malleable, constructed process that 1) is located within the context of racial inequality at the broader, social level, and 2) which can possibly act as sites of resistance where attempts to subvert these power imbalances can take place.

The trend in recent years, then, has been to move away from stage-like models of identity development in adolescence (e.g. Erikson, 1968) towards attempts at capturing a more dynamic view of identity in youth, both generally (e.g., Hall, 1990; Hegde, 1998) and with particular reference to ethno-racially diverse youth (e.g., Lewis, 2000). There is growing consensus among researchers that identity in ethno-racially diverse youth is fluid, flexible, and comprised of multiple elements (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000; Lee, 1990; Phinney, 1990). Further, there is the suggestion that identity is used strategically and

deliberately by youth to achieve particular goals in specific situations (Goodenow & Espin, 1993; Simmons, Ramos, & Bielmeir, 2000; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999).

It is difficult, however, to evaluate the legitimacy of these claims, since a thorough review of current literature suggests that the way identity in ethno-racially diverse youth is now being *conceptualized* is inconsistent with the way this topic is typically *studied*. Ethnic/bicultural identity is discussed as being a dynamic, flexible, multi-faceted construct with youth as active agents fuelling both its formation and expression. This suggests a *process-focused* view of identity. Aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., Desai & Subramanian, 2000; Goodenow & Espin, 1993; Scourfield, Evans, Shah, & Beynon, 2005), however, ethnic/bicultural identity research is outcome-focused, and these constructs are largely studied as *fixed variables*. Specifically:

- 1) **Ethnic/bicultural identity is studied as if it is fixed and stable.** Despite a growing acknowledgement that identity in ethno-racially diverse youth shifts and changes over a lifetime, and is expressed differently across situations (e.g., Cameron & Lalonde, 1994; Yon, 2000), most research in this area studies the ethno-racial portion of identity as a fixed and stable entity. This research is focused on the period of adolescence, when an individual deals with identity issues in general (e.g., Montemayer, 2000; Phinney, 1989; 1990). Once established, the ethnic or bicultural identity is assumed to be relatively stable over time and across experiences. Viewing ethnic/bicultural identity in this way limits our understanding of this construct to one point in time, within a confined set of circumstances.

- 2) **Ethnic/bicultural identity is studied as an independent variable.** Although researchers claim that ethnic/racial aspects of identity can be underplayed or foregrounded, depending on the particular demands of a social environment (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000; Lewis, 2000), ethnic/bicultural identity is studied as if it is an independent variable that either places these youths at risk, or protects them from potentially negative outcomes. Focusing solely on the risk or protective value of ethnic/bicultural identity privileges (or problematizes) the role of ethnicity/race on the development and expression of identity, and overlooks how other factors in a person's life can *also* be relevant in these processes. Along with ethno-racial background, class (e.g., Waters, 1994), and gender (e.g., Bhogle, 1999; DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002; Goodenow & Espin, 1999; Handa, 2003; Saraswathi, 1999) can influence how identity develops and how it is expressed. By excluding these from consideration (along with factors such as sexual orientation, ability/disability etc.), studies of ethnic/bicultural identity are ignoring how this collection of factors interacts to affect identity formation and expression in ethno-racially diverse youth (Handa, 2003; James, 1999).
- 3) **The role of youth in expressing these identities is unclear.** Recent research in the area of ethnic/bicultural identity suggests that youth actively assess and negotiate different aspects of their social environments in order to deploy particular identities situationally and intentionally (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000; Simmons et al., 2000; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999). While youth are understood to be agentic and deliberate in their expression of an

ethnic/bicultural identity, an explanatory model capable of describing *where, why and how* youths engage in this process is absent.

Despite recent shifts that discuss identity in ethno-racially diverse youth is a fluid and dynamic process, current research continues to be conducted as though ethnic/bicultural identity is a fixed variable. This contradiction is, in large part, due to the lack of fit between researchers' goals (i.e., to capture this fluidity and dynamism), and the theoretical and methodological frameworks that are used to guide studies in this area. Within this body of work, the theoretical basis for analysis is typically a blend of the developmental theory, the social identity framework, and/or an ecological systems perspective. These guiding frameworks are limiting, as they are not equipped to handle notions of dynamism and complexity the same way that alternative theories might. Further, aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., Desai & Subramanian, 2000; Goodenow & Espin, 1993; James, 1999; Smith, 2005), the methodologies typically used to study identity in ethno-racially diverse youth are quantitative in nature, with a focus on outcomes, rather than process. While such methods are useful for providing an overall picture of people's experiences, surveys or questionnaires are limited in terms of their ability to provide insight into multi-faceted processes or the subjective meanings that are attributed to (these) phenomenon (Cauce, 2002).

Rationale for the Present Study

By focusing specifically on second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, the present work attempts to reconcile this contradiction between the way identity in ethno-racially diverse youth is described (i.e., as a fluid, dynamic, multi-faceted process), and how these processes are actually studied. I endeavoured to achieve this goal by 1) using

underlying theories whose assumptions are consistent with the notion of identity as dynamic, complex, and multidimensional, and 2) by employing a process-focused research approach and methodology that are capable of capturing the fluid quality and subjective nature of identity.

I have approached this study with three main assumptions. These assumptions reflect a blending of concepts borrowed from a symbolic interactionist perspective (e.g., Hewitt, 1991), and an anti-oppression framework (e.g., Dominelli, 2002):

- 1) **Identity is both stable and flexible.** While identity reflects some underlying stability, it is a complex, dynamic, and constantly shifting construct that is created through human interaction, differs across situations, and evolves over a lifetime;
- 2) **Identity is comprised of several expressions.** The ethno-racial portion of identity is one of many dimensions that make up a person's identity. Each of these dimensions interacts with other aspects of identity, and are expressed differently depending on the context in which the interaction is taking place; and
- 3) **Youth are active agents in the expression of identity.** Ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults actively negotiate different aspects of their environments, and make deliberate, strategic choices about how identities are expressed within human interactions. The way that identity is enacted reflects and reproduces social structures.

In an attempt to access these aspects of identity, I have used a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and a corresponding qualitative methodology (Patton, 2001) to capture the dynamic, fluid process of identity in a group of ethno-

racially diverse adolescents and young adults who have grown up entirely in the Canadian context.

By using symbolic interactionist and anti-oppression perspectives as guiding frameworks, and by using a qualitative methodology that is capable of tapping into multi-faceted, subjective processes, (Cauce, 2002), I have attempted to show how second-generation South Asian-Canadian youth describe the different facets of their identities, and how they are expressed. The research questions and theoretical underpinnings guiding this work, along with the approach and methodology used in this study are described in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I outline the research questions guiding this study, and I provide an overview of the two main approaches used to inform this work (i.e., symbolic interactionism and the anti-oppressive social work framework). I then describe the methods used to understand identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, including details about the qualitative methodology and grounded theory approach, participants, sampling/recruitment, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations in conducting the research.

Research Questions

The goal of the present research was to explore identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth (between the ages 18-25). The following research questions were informed by Hewitt's (1991) description of biographical (i.e., personal and social aspects of identity that are more or less stable over time and across situations), and situated identities (i.e., aspects of identity that are expressed differently depending on particular contexts)¹². These research questions were designed to gain a process-focused understanding of identity, and were guided by the assumptions outlined the previous section (i.e., identity as both stable and flexible; identity as comprised of multiple expressions; and youths as active agents in determining the way that their identities are expressed). Race, gender, and class (as the 3 primary ascribed statuses most often referred to in discussions of identity) (Dei, 1996), were used as entry points through

¹² Hewitt's (1991) distinctions are discussed in greater detail in the following discussion on the theoretical frameworks underlying the proposed study, under the subheading "Symbolic Interactionism".

which to understand these processes.

Research Questions #1 and #2 were focused on describing the nature of youths' identities, while Research Questions #3 and #4 were aimed at understanding how these identities are expressed:

1. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth describe their identities?
2. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth describe the two main portions of their national identities: the Canadian and the South Asian?
3. What critical elements do youth describe as shaping the expression of their identities?
4. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth use their identities in interactions with others in their social environments?

Theoretical Underpinnings

The main conceptual frameworks used to guide this study were the symbolic interactionist theory, and the anti-oppressive approach to social work practice. These perspectives were selected as guiding frameworks because both describe identity as a fluid, dynamic, and context-bound process that is shaped by human interaction. Specifically, these perspectives support the view that 1) despite an underlying stability, identity is flexible; 2) identity is comprised of multiple expressions; and 3) youths are active agents in expressing these identities.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

The roots of symbolic interactionism lie in the work of pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist, George Herbert Mead (Ritzer, 1992). For Mead (1934), the individual continuously interacts with the world in dynamic ways, and meaning is achieved through coordinated social interaction. The symbolic interactionist perspective is based on the notion that human interaction shapes the nature of identity, and that human behaviour cannot be fully comprehended without also understanding the social processes through which they are created (Hewitt, 1991; Strauss, 1956). In other words, humans are social beings who interact in meaningful ways to create identity. Identity is not an objective “thing”, but rather a process that emerges based on each interaction, and the shared meanings that arise from these exchanges.

Mead (1934) described the developed self as being comprised of 1) the biographical self (the subject, or the “I”), which is relatively stable, and 2) the generalized other (the object, or the “me”), which varies from interaction to interaction, and whose expression is guided by cultural/societal norms¹³. “Without both, the self would be dominated entirely by either external controls (‘me’) or internal controls (‘I’)... The ‘I’ and the ‘me’ are thus parts of the whole social process and allow individuals and society to function creatively and effectively” (Mead, 1934, p. 344).

Consistent with this view, symbolic interactionists view identity as having a stable aspect that allows for constancy over time and circumstances, and a flexible, or variable aspect that shifts across situations (Hewitt, 1991; Ritzer, 1992). According to Hewitt (1991), identity is made up of the “personal identity”, the “social identity”, and the

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of Mead’s “I” and “me”, see pages 135-226 of Mead, G. H. (1934), Mind, self, and society. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

“situated identity”. The *personal identity* is the most basic part of our selves, and provides us with the distinct qualities that make us unique individuals. This sense of separateness is balanced by our social identities, which emerge as we participate in various social groups. By interacting and identifying with members of these groups, we achieve a sense of belonging and likeness with others. Together, the personal and social identities form our biographical (stable) identity that is linked to a variety of roles, situations, and groups over time.

Along with these stable characteristics, our identity is also flexible, with numerous dimensions that may be enacted depending on the situation. In any situation, we see ourselves as occupying a particular role relative to others, and act in accordance with that role. For example, although at different times I might occupy the role of “mother”, “partner”, “daughter”, “friend”, etc., while standing at the front of a classroom full of students, I might assume the role of “instructor”. This would require that I speak at length on a particular topic, that I answer students’ questions, that I explain assignments, etc. My *situated identity* as instructor not only distinguishes me from others in the classroom, but it also shapes my behaviour by directing me towards particular activities consistent with that role. Indeed, “to have an identity is...not only to have a sense of how one is located relative to others in a situation, but it is to gain energy and direction in one’s conduct by adopting the perspective and purposes of the situation and one’s role in it” (Hewitt, 1991, p. 129).

The situated identity most relevant in particular circumstances determines how identity is expressed. Identity, however, is not simply a lens through which we see the world. While social norms function to shape our interactions and stimulate the emergence

of particular identities, we also *use* our identities to actively re-form these interactions (Strauss, 1956; Ritzer, 1992). The human ability to assess a particular situation and determine which identity to enact, and how to do so, is what underlies social change. Indeed, “the reality of the world is not something that is ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered by us, but is actively created as we act in and toward the world” (Hewitt, 1991, p. 9).

According to symbolic interactionists, then, stability in our identity is reflected through our personal and social identities. This biographical identity fuels various situated identities, allowing us to strategically select which role or identity is most appropriate for the social situation. This perspective is helpful in understanding identity in youth, *in general*, since it views identity as dynamic, multiple, and context-specific. The anti-oppression framework described next is helpful in understanding the role of ethnicity/race in identity formation and expression, and how these processes occur, *in particular*, in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth.

The Anti-Oppressive Approach to Social Work

Views on ethnic/racial difference have shifted considerably in Canadian social work research and practice during the last fifty years (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). Prior to the late 1960s, a commonality of needs was assumed, and issues related to ethno-racial difference were, for the most part, overlooked. Since that time, various perspectives have dominated, including the colour-blind approach, models of cultural pathology and inferiority, and theories highlighting cultural difference, plurality, multiculturalism, and diversity¹⁴. These frameworks sought to understand individual-level problems within

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the different ways the field of social work has understood the role of ethnicity/race in the lives of Canadians, see Al-Krenawi, A. & Graham, J. R. (Eds.) (2003). Multicultural

broader issues like racism, oppression, discrimination, and deprivation (Tsang & George, 1998). Recently, anti-racist models of social work (which emphasize the integration between individual, organizational, and structural inequalities) (e.g., Dei, 1996; Calliste & Dei, 2000), and the more holistic anti-oppression models have predominated (e.g., Dominelli, 2002). The latter focuses on how all forms of identity (including age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, ability, religion, sexual identity, class, etc.) form the basis of inequality, and thus create a forum for awareness and change.

The anti-oppressive framework is rooted in the social constructionist tradition. Similar to symbolic interactionists, social constructionists believe that meaning is negotiated within human interactions, through the use of language (Burr, 1995). The focus here, however, is on the nature of reality. Specifically, reality is seen as a co-creation that takes place through the ongoing exchange of language (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Identity is both formed and sustained through these interactions. Although reflecting some constancy, identity is flexible, multiple, and constantly negotiated across situations, places, and time (Bhabha, 1994; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1994). Indeed, identity is first created through social processes, and once established, is sustained, modified, and reshaped by these social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This flexibility allows us to engage in a continuous reformulation of our identities, since we occupy different realities and take part in different social interactions throughout our lives (Shotter, 1993). In each of these interactions, we actively construct our identities based on the features and goals of the situations in which we participate.

In addition to these basic social constructionist ideas, central to the anti-oppressive perspective are notions of power and oppression. According to Dei (1996), those in society with power and privilege have both material and symbolic advantages over those without. Material advantages (e.g., in the form of money, property, etc.) are often gained as a result of symbolic advantages, like light skin, or facility with the dominant language (Perry, 2001). These advantages are used to establish and sustain systems of oppression where people are divided into dominant/superior groups, and subordinate/inferior ones based on various social distinctions (e.g., class, caste, race, gender, etc.) (Calliste & Dei, 2000). Oppression occurs when “these relations of domination consist of the systematic devaluing of the attributes and contributions of those deemed inferior, and their exclusion from the social resources available to those in the dominant groups” (Dominelli, 2000, p. 8).

Systems of oppression are critically linked to identity. Since identity is constructed through social interaction, oppressive relations *also* have a role in how our identities are formed and expressed. This results in self-identifications (either conscious or unconscious) as either an oppressor or one who is oppressed. Specifically,

(I)identity is constituted through interactions with people. These occur at both individual and collective levels and involve negotiations around their perceptions of each other, their status and position in the social world, their access to psychological, social, economic, and physical resources, and their own personal attributes and aspirations (Dominelli, 2000, p. 10).

According to the anti-oppressive framework, identity, while reflecting some underlying stability, is both flexible and multiple. Dei (1996), for example, suggests that it is impossible to capture the full range of human experience without recognizing that daily, we occupy various subject positions. These include (but are not limited to) race,

class, and gender¹⁵. Our identities are complex, interconnected webs of race, gender, class, and other critical aspects that are sites of power dynamics responsible for shaping the human condition (Calliste & Dei, 2000). These identities are expressed differentially, depending on the characteristics of the context, and the goals (either explicit or implicit) of those involved (Dei, 1996).

Since these identities are multiple and can vary across situations, it is important to recognize that an individual can be an oppressor *and* someone who is oppressed at the same time (Dominelli, 2000). Race, class, and gender are intertwined in complex ways (Collins, 1990; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Mahtani, 2004; Razack, 1998)¹⁶ that make it possible, for example, for someone in a disadvantaged position based on gender to simultaneously occupy a position of racial privilege. The expression of a particular identity is a strategic choice that is made by the actor, based on both the constraints and the goals of the particular interaction. These identity choices function to either reproduce or resist systems of oppression (Dominelli, 2000). By recognizing that these processes are at play, it is the hope of those working from an anti-oppressive social framework that this knowledge be used to eradicate oppressive relationships both within the field, as well as in the broader society.

The anti-oppressive framework is helpful in understanding identity formation and expression in second-generation South Asian-Canadian youth, since it suggests that 1) our identities are multiple; 2) while some aspects of our identities are relatively stable

¹⁵ Systems of oppression can be established based on the categorization of various identities, including race, caste, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. The present discussion, however, will be limited to a focus on race, class, gender, religion, and nationality, as these are most relevant to the current work.

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion on how race, class, and gender operate together, see Fellows, M. L. & Razack, S. (1998). The race to innocence: Confronting hierarchical relations among women. Journal of Gender, Race, & Justice, 1, 335-352.

(e.g., race, gender, class), the way that each is expressed varies across both time and situations; and 3) since these identities are constructed and reconstructed across situations, youth make strategic choices in expressing these identities such that they either contribute to or resist the reproduction of oppressive relationships.

Methods Used in this Study

Qualitative Methodology

Aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., Desai & Subramanian, 2000; Goodenow & Espin, 1993; James, 1999), research looking at the role of ethnicity/race in identity in youth from diverse backgrounds has typically relied on quantitative methodologies. Given that the focus of quantitative methods is to gain objective, neutral data about particular phenomenon, such methods are ill equipped to capture subjective understandings of events and processes in a person's life (Cauce, 2002).

In order to understand the dynamic, fluid process of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, the present study, instead, used a qualitative methodology. Theoretically rooted in symbolic interactionism, a qualitative methodology is used to access subjective understandings of people's perceptions about others, symbols, and objects (Berg, 2004; Strauss, 1987). Within a qualitative methodology, meaning is not intrinsically located in a "thing", but is arrived at as people interact socially with one another. Since the goal of the present study was to describe patterns of living, understand how participants make sense of their experiences, and explain the nature of the person's processes (Patton, 2001), a qualitative methodology, with its naturalistic, inductive, holistic and dynamic focus, fit well with the purpose of this research.

Grounded Theory Approach

The particular qualitative methodology used in the present work is grounded theory. Grounded theory is a specific style of working with qualitative data that focuses on exploration, induction, and theory development, rather than the confirmation of hypotheses (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Patton, 2001; Strauss, 1987). This approach involves generating theory

...that (is) derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another... (T)he researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

The goals of this approach are to discover ways of defining concepts, and to study the relationships and processes underlying these concepts (Gilgun, 1994). A grounded theory approach, then, has allowed for the development of a conceptual framework of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth that is both rooted in, and reflects participants' lived experiences.

Participants

In this study, participants are South Asian-Canadian youth (between the ages of 18-25) who have been raised entirely in Canada. I have chosen to focus on second-generation, South Asian-Canadians because of my own interest in, and personal identification with members of this group. Similar to Handa (2003), I use the term South Asian to refer to those with a historical and cultural connection to the South Asian subcontinent (which includes India, Pakistan, Republic of Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh), as well as those who have migrated from the South Asian subcontinent to other countries (e.g., East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, the Caribbean, Fiji, etc.).

In previous sections, I have argued that identity likely shifts and changes over one's lifetime. In the present study, however, my focus was limited to persons between the ages of 18-25. During these years, identity issues may be particularly salient as young people may confront issues around occupation, education, ideology, and personal relationships (Bibby & Posterski, 1992; Egan & Cowan, 1980). It is at this time, for example, that an individual might begin to broaden her/his social networks, live on her/his own for the first time, and/or explore different ways of looking at the world. By restricting my attention to this time period, I am not suggesting that the processes underlying identity formation and expression are limited only to adolescence/young adulthood. Instead, I have attempted to gain a focused, in-depth understanding of these processes during a specific time in life when these issues may be notably significant¹⁷.

Sampling and Recruitment

Sampling in qualitative research involves “(focusing on) relatively small samples...selected *purposefully* to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon *in-depth*” (Patton, 2001, p. 46, emphasis in original). In the present study, I relied on two non-random techniques for sampling participants. First, I used a purposeful sampling strategy in order to recruit individuals who share specific characteristics that were consistent with the goals of the study (i.e., second-generation, South Asian-Canadians between the ages of 18-25) (Creswell, 2003). Second, I employed a snowball sampling procedure to recruit additional participants. Snowball sampling involves initially identifying a small number of potential participants who are then asked to

¹⁷ In anticipation of future research possibilities that investigate how longitudinally, identity processes might change with time and experience, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they would like to be contacted if additional opportunities to take part in such studies should arise.

suggest others who might fit the criteria for participation in the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2001).

A total of 26 participants (15 young women and 11 young men) were recruited from a major Canadian city (Ottawa, Ontario) and its surrounding areas. In order to recruit potential participants, I: 1) placed flyers (see Appendix A) at local educational institutions (the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and Algonquin College), and at South Asian-specific shops and services; 2) made connections with local South Asian youth groups; and 3) relied on informal social connections and “word of mouth”.

Although my intention was to recruit a total of 30 participants (15 young women and 15 young men), theoretical saturation was reached at $n = 26$. Theoretical saturation is said to have occurred when no new themes or additional knowledge are likely to emerge with additional participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants received an honorarium of \$20 to thank them for taking part in the study, and to offset any costs incurred as a result of their participation (e.g., travel, parking, etc.).

Race, gender, and class were used as entry points through which to understand identity in study participants. All 26 participants were selected based on their shared South Asian ethno-racial background. In order to understand the role of gender in identity processes, the sample was comprised of 15 young women, and 11 young men. In order to understand the role of class in participants’ identities, I attempted to recruit participants from families with a wide range of average incomes¹⁸, however using the recruitment

¹⁸ Different class categorizations (i.e., lower, middle, and upper) were to be based on youths’ self-identification as people from particular socio-economic groups.

strategies outlined above, the sample was comprised entirely of individuals from the middle class¹⁹.

Data Collection

The in-depth, qualitative interview was the primary means of collecting data (Patton, 2001). The purpose of the in-depth interview is to understand, in detail, people's accounts of particular experiences, thoughts, and processes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Given that the goal of the proposed study was to capture these accounts as they relate to identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, the in-depth interview was an appropriate methodological choice to fulfill this objective.

An Interview Guide Approach (Patton, 2001) was used in the present study. Specific topics to be addressed were identified prior to conducting the actual interview, but the exact order and wording of questions remained flexible, and emerged through conversation with each participant. Using the Interview Guide Approach ensured that the same basic issues were discussed with each participant, but also provided me (as the interviewer) with the freedom to explore and probe other, potentially relevant and interesting themes that emerged through the course of the interview. The specific topic areas included in the Interview Guide (see Appendix B) were designed to respond to the research questions outlined earlier.

Analysis

In-depth interviews were audio-taped (with consent from the participant) in order to obtain an accurate record of the session. After completing each interview, tape-recorded conversations were transcribed verbatim. Analysis began during data collection,

¹⁹ The homogeneous nature of the sample's class composition will be discussed as a limitation of the study in the Chapters 5 & 6.

and was ongoing in order to constantly compare existing and emergent themes, and to check for theoretical saturation. Interview data was analysed using methods consistent with a grounded theory approach. According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), this involves developing broad categories using “open coding” procedures; creating specific codes used to categorize the experiences of participants; comparing textual material with established codes for either confirmation or the development of new codes; and finally creating a theoretical framework to meaningfully depict the processes being considered. The analysis of data continued until each category was determined to be independent of other categories, and no new themes seemed likely to emerge (i.e., until theoretical saturation was reached). Analysis and coding was facilitated by the use of NVivo, computer software used specifically for qualitative research.

Establishing Credibility

The credibility, or trustworthiness, of the data was established in three ways. First, an “audit trail” was developed throughout both stages of data gathering and analysis. Creating an audit trail involves documenting all of the steps taken while collecting and examining the data (Patton, 2001). With an audit trail, the basic processes of data collection and analysis are transparent, allowing the reader to evaluate the credibility of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

“Member-checking” was the second way of ensuring the credibility of the data. Member-checking involves maintaining ongoing contact with research participants, in order to involve them in each phase of the data analysis (Cresswell, 2003). For example, feedback from participants was solicited at the end of each interview, again after reading a transcript of the interview, and finally after reading the preliminary draft of the

findings. In addition, all quotes featured in the final version of this document were used only after being confirmed for accuracy by each participant.

Finally, credibility of the data was ensured through consistency and communicability. Consistency involves providing evidence that “core concepts and themes consistently occur(ed) in a variety of cases and in different settings”, (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 90). Communicability involves presenting rich detail and thick descriptions (Patton, 2001) of concepts so that “(r)eaders who have never been in (the) research setting should feel confident that they can now find their way around the arena that (is) described” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 91). Consistency and communicability was achieved by supporting emergent concepts and themes with illustrative quotations where appropriate.

Ethical Considerations

Risks of Participation

There were no direct risks to participation in this research. It was possible, however, that discussions of personal experiences might be uncomfortable for some participants. In order to minimize this risk, I attempted to maximize the physical comfort of the participant by conducting the interview in a location s/he preferred. In most cases, interviews took place in lab spaces located at the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and Algonquin College. Prior to commencing interviews, each participant was notified of her/his right to skip over any topic or question she wished not to discuss, and was assured that s/he could stop the interview at any time or withdraw her/his participation at any time without penalty. In addition, I assured participants that I would be available for debriefing following the interview. A list of appropriate counselling

supports was made available, in the event that these measures were not sufficient in minimizing any risks of participation.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of each interview. Each participant was presented with an Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendices C and D), which outlined the purpose of research, and described her/his rights as a participant. Participants were encouraged to ask questions or request clarification on any issue at any point throughout the interview process. Participants indicated their understanding of the purpose of this study and their role within it by providing their signature on the Consent Form.

Confidentiality

Participants were assured (both verbally and written in the Consent Form) that all information will be held in the strictest of confidence, with no names or identifying statements being used in this final dissertation document. All tapes and interview transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Only I have had access to these data. A Research Assistant, who was hired to transcribe interviews, was required to sign a standard agreement of confidentiality prior to commencing employment.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to attempt to gain a deep understanding of the complexity of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth. Research Questions #1 and #2 were aimed at understanding the nature of identity in these youth, while Research Questions #3 and #4 were focused on gaining insight into how these identities are expressed. In this chapter, I present the 4 main findings from in-depth interviews with participants (see Table 1 for a summary of these results). These findings are:

- 1) Youths' identities are multi-dimensional. These dimensions are inter-related in many meaningful and complex ways;
- 2) Youths' identities are flexible, and change both across situations and over the course of a lifetime;
- 3) Youths' identities are created and re-created based on the dynamic interplay between their personal interests, their family, their relationship with the South Asian community, and the nature of their surrounding context; and
- 4) Youth use particular expressions of identity strategically to achieve specific goals in social situations.

Following a brief summary of general participant characteristics, I present each of these findings in greater detail below. Where appropriate, I use illustrative quotations to highlight particular themes and interesting points.

The Participants

The second-generation, South Asian-Canadians who took part in this study are 15 young women and 11 young men, ranging in age from 18-24 years old (mean = 20.4 years). Most participants were born in Ontario (69%)²⁰, while 12% were born elsewhere in Canada, and 20% were born outside of the country. Youths' families had lived in Canada for an average of 26.5 years, ranging from 15-40 years.

In terms of religious affiliation, 31% of participants are Hindu, 27% are Ismaili Muslim, 19% are Sikh, 8% are Muslim, 8% are Christian, and 8% of participants identified themselves as non-religious. With regard to nationality, 58% of youth saw themselves as "Canadian", while 23% saw themselves as "South Asian". Nineteen percent of youth used hyphenated terms to describe their nationalities (e.g., Indo-Canadian, South Asian-Canadian).

Many participants reported having grown up in nuclear families (58%), but a considerable number of youth lived in homes with extended family members (42%), (e.g., grandparents, uncles/aunts, cousins). For most participants (89%), the average family income while growing up was greater than \$60,000, typically with two working parents in the home.

The languages spoken by participants include English, French, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, and South Asian languages (Hindi, Tamil, Gujurathi, Katchi, Urdu, Punjabi, Malayalam, Bengali, and Telegu), with all participants speaking between 2 and 4 languages (including a South Asian language). All participants were either pursuing or

²⁰ In some cases, the percentages reported here do not total 100% because of rounding.

had completed an undergraduate/college degree, and many individuals also worked in part-time jobs (usually service-related). Although none of the participants were married or had children, 46% reported being in long-term relationships at the time of this study.

Identity as Multi-Dimensional

The purpose of Research Question #1 (i.e., How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth describe their identities?) was to understand how participants see themselves, with reference to different social groups or categories. Youth discussed their identities as being comprised of multiple dimensions or expressions, including race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity/culture, nationality, and other elements. Findings suggest that rather than being a unitary property, youths' identities are multi-dimensional. These dimensions are inter-related in many meaningful and complex ways.

Race

Youth described seeing themselves as members of a particular racial group they referred to as "brown". "Brown" is a broad term describing all South Asian people of various religious and cultural backgrounds. When asked to elaborate, participants discussed how brown people share a historical connection to the Indian subcontinent, which is reflected in their skin colour, and the various traditions and customs that are practiced. Youth also drew from general cultural stereotypes to explain what it means to be brown.

I guess you sort of associate being brown with being able to dance...not necessarily East or West Indian, just brown in general...(And)...as you grow older, you recognize (that while) stereotypical white people just have sex all the time, brown girls don't have sex (at all)...(Shafreen)

Participants spoke about how these distinctions based on race have resulted in their being labeled as a member of the related, broader identity category, “visible minority”. Here, what is visually apparent is used as a rationale for grouping those who are “white” together, and those who are not white as visible minorities. For these youth, race is a primary identifier since it is often the first thing people react to, it is permanent, and it is always evident. Although they themselves are conscious of the fact that their race is different from the mainstream, it is not something that persistently occupies their thoughts. It is made salient, however, when *others* (read “white” people) orient to their “brown-ness”.

It’s something I just don’t remember. I feel like I’m kind of South Asian in name more than anything. Maybe living with that has almost affected me more than actually being a minority...is being *seen* as a minority...It is strange to be perceived as one thing when you don’t even really...I mean, maybe it’s 5th on my list of things, you know? It just constantly surprises me that it’s the first thing people see. (Meera)

Participants identified these racial distinctions as exclusionary. Specifically, they talked about how these racial divisions help members of the mainstream to categorize them as sharing some kind of connection with other visible minorities. Further, it is assumed that there exists a fundamental bond between all brown people. This “primordial connection” functions to separate brown people from other Canadians (read “white”). This exclusion has psychological, as well as social consequences (e.g., feelings of frustration and anxiety at being isolated and segregated).

People think, I mean obviously I look South Asian, but people think that I’ve got some kind of basic primordial kind of connection to India...I have a lot of friends who are white, and a lot of them have been to India and I haven’t. And so when people say things to me like that, I think “You probably know more about India than I do.” So it’s a bit frustrating too. I find that I’m pretty conscious about not doing that to other people. I have a couple of Chinese-Canadian friends, and I wouldn’t say to them “Oh, I love fortune cookies.” I think that’s really insulting.

Often, I guess I forget that just by looking at me, you can tell that I'm not a typical Canadian. (Meera)

Gender

A second dimension of identity participants often referred to was gender.

Participants drew from traditional cultural stereotypes when describing what it means to be either female or male. This includes certain emotional stereotypes (e.g., women as sensitive and emotional, men as tough) and behavioural stereotypes (e.g., women as sexual beings and/or caretakers of the family, men as providers and protectors). Youth discussed their own gender as either being consistent or inconsistent with these general stereotypical features.

I think first, I consider myself to be a woman, I guess. I have a lot of really close girlfriends, we like to do "girly" things, we like to emphasize our femaleness...I could even say our sexuality sometimes, when we go out, you know, we like to dress up, wear makeup, we like to do our hair. (Rekha)

(I do the) same things as every other guy. I don't know...study, shower, go play sports, go out with friends...drink beer, play golf...Things like that. (Mahesh)

Participants went further to distinguish between what it means to be a "good South Asian girl" and what a more "Canadian" woman might look like. They described how the characteristics of the situation determine whether qualities of the former or the latter are reflected. For example, a young South Asian-Canadian woman might behave more like a "Canadian" while surrounded by white friends (e.g., be more outgoing, talk freely with young men), but may exhibit more "South Asian" behaviours (e.g., be more modest, be more "motherly") when socializing with other South Asians.

I'm much more outgoing, I'm very extroverted compared to the docile Indian girl...South Asian girls are supposed to be very introverted and respectful and quiet and not voice their opinions, not be so friendly with guys...Even the way I dress, people are like...Sometimes I'll wear a lower top and I'll show a little bit of chest area, and they'll go "Oh God...scandalous". It depends on where we're

going...if we're out to where a lot of brown people are, I won't, but if it's to school, I won't care so much. (Shafreen)

Gender is important, especially when you're South Asian...When I go to (one of my female) friend's house, she'll always bring us tea and bring us food and like serve us, and most of the time we don't even think about it, but then you're like "Wow, that's really weird...Why would she do that"? But maybe it's like a socialization, like she's been programmed to do that...She'll be very motherly, womanly...She'll be very nice, she'll go out of her way to make you feel good in her house...(She's) very modest...Stuff like that, it's something that I never had to go through, as a guy. I never had to worry about...Like, one time, we went there, and she opened the door and she was wearing shorts. She ran into her room and put on pants...She feels she has to be modest around other guys. (Amir)

Class

Rarely did participants discuss class as a meaningful part of their identities. Class was simply a taken-for-granted constant in most participants' lives. When probed, they identified themselves as middle-middle/upper class, and defined this category as comprised of families with two working parents, a modest home, two vehicles, a home computer with the internet, and the ability to afford all of the "basic necessities"²¹. For these youth, this identity dimension was only significant, however, insofar as the opportunities (e.g., access to education) and financial security/safety it has afforded them²².

I probably wouldn't think of identifying myself with class, but I also think it does have a lot to do with who I am...I would define myself as upper-middle class. I think I probably had a lot more opportunities than most other people. I mean, there was never really any question about whether I would be able to go to university, and I was always encouraged to. I guess that's the main thing. I don't think my life wouldn't have seemed so set out, and I don't even really mean that

²¹ This view is consistent with mainstream, Canadian notions of what constitutes a "middle class" or "middle-upper class" socio-economic category (Pincus, 2006).

²² This finding is likely due to the homogeneity of the sample (i.e., based on family income, all participants would be considered as members of the middle class). This homogeneity is the result of both the sampling strategy employed, as well as the age range sampled (i.e., participants between the ages 18-25 likely had parents who arrived in Canada during the late 1960s – early 1970s, and were therefore admitted under the "point system"). This sampling bias combined with the effects of immigration policies during this time period will be discussed in more detail in the Discussion section.

in a bad way. I just felt like I had a lot of options. I could have done most of the things I wanted to do. I think that middle-upper class means. (Meera)

When probed further, rather than discussing class distinctions here in Canada, these youth often referred to *caste* distinctions from “back in India” (e.g., “Jut”, “Brahmin”). Participants acknowledged, however, that while caste differences might have some practical significance “back home”, these distinctions are only symbolically meaningful here in Canada.

My mom’s family...was Jut, and when they came here, my uncle, my mom’s brother, he got a job, and he had to sweep somewhere. And he was like “What? How can I sweep? I’m a Jut”. It was something that he wouldn’t have done in India. All he had to do was farm...he wouldn’t have to clean or anything. But he did it anyways. But stuff like that, people that come new here, they’re blown away by the things they have to do here...things they wouldn’t have to do in India...When you come here, it doesn’t matter (what caste you were back in India). We’re all the same. (Gurpreet)

Religion

Participants in this study often referred to religion as a meaningful identity dimension. Youth typically fell into one of three main categories reflecting different levels of religious identification: low identifiers, high identifiers, or moderate identifiers. Low identifiers most often grew up with little emphasis on religion in the family home, while higher identifiers usually had one or both parents who themselves exhibited a high level of religiosity²³. In many cases, however, participants in this study described themselves as being moderately religious, meaning that they celebrated major religious functions, but that religion did not play a central role in their day-to-day lives.

²³ Youth who identified themselves as “Practicing Hindus”, “Muslims” or “Ismaili Muslims” tended mostly to be “high identifiers”. For these participants, religion informs one’s worldview, shapes her/his behaviours, and determines with whom they interact socially. According to these youth, Hinduism/Islam is more than just religion; it is a way of life that is tied intricately to one’s ethnicity and culture.

The strength of youth's identification with religion appears to have significant social consequences. Participants described how high identifiers tend to socialize more with other high identifiers, while religious affiliation has little impact on friendships for low identifiers. Religious distinctions, then, can form the basis of powerful inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics among second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, particularly when considering future potential mates.

With Islam, it's part of your life. Everything you do reflects your religion, because there's your material part and your spiritual part, and it's all a part of your life...Even socially, the friends you meet tend to be more of your religion. It's not that you intentionally do that, but when there (are) functions at the mosque, those are the people that are there, those are the people you have these similarities with, those are the people that understand. You can have your outside friends, you can go to a club or a bar or whatever with these other friends, but it's not the same as when you go to the mosque... (Jamila)

I feel that one day I will want to marry (an Ismaili Muslim). It all boils down to because I want kids. How do you raise your kids if they are of a different background? I don't want to have that whole notion of "We'll give them a choice when they get older, we'll teach them a little bit of my religion and teach them a little bit of your religion." I want them to have one religion...Not be narrow minded—I want them to be open about every religion...I've just been brought up as a child an Ismaili Muslim, I like to be an Ismaili, I'm proud to be an Ismaili, and I want my kids to be Ismaili. I find that interacting as a family as a whole, as a community. With my family, specifically, if you are an Ismaili it's so much easier. (Jamal)

Nationality

Participants in this study also identified themselves in terms of nationality.

National identities, however, are not exclusive categories. For these youth, there tends to be a primary identification (usually "Canadian"), then a secondary identification (either "South Asian" or "Indian"). Participants pointed to two reasons for identifying first as "Canadian": 1) Canada is their place of birth (i.e., they are legally considered Canadian citizens), and 2) they see most of their values as more consistent with "Canadian" values (e.g., freedom, independence) than "South Asian" values (e.g., not talking back to elders,

doing what you're told). The South Asian national identity, however, is still important, and so being "Indian" or "South Asian" is a critical, secondary identification. For most participants, then, the two main national identities co-exist. Youth are proud to share membership in both the broader, Canadian mainstream, while at the same time participating in their ethno-racial/cultural group.

My parents always tell me "You're Indian... Your origin is India". It's true for them, but it's not true for me. My origins, to me, are in Canada. It's where I'm from, and to be Canadian, to me, is just to have that sense of pride that you believe in yourself, because you get the freedom to do anything. Whereas back home, you couldn't do that, right? According to (my parents), you couldn't just go out in the street and walk around, at whatever time of night... you'd get in trouble. But here, it seems you can do whatever you want, whenever you want to do it. You can say what you want to somebody, and not feel ashamed, whereas over there, you were always taught that you couldn't say anything to an adult. They told you something—that was it; that was right. Here, it's not like that. You can actually stand up for yourself. (Jayanthi)

I would probably use the cliché term of Indo-Canadian... I am both. Having been born here... (and living) here all my life, I've been able to adopt a lot of the practices, a lot of the traditions, and a lot of the everyday activities that they do here, and I like them. I would live here, given any choice of anywhere... But otherwise, I am Indian. I've never been ashamed of it, I've never once denied it... Being Indo-Canadian really to me means being able to combine the two nationalities. We have sort created this. I think people here, they aren't Indian and they're not Canadian. They are a mix of the two. (Ashima)

For these participants, this is what makes Canada unique: the ability to take full part in mainstream, Canadian society while also maintaining one's ethno-racial and cultural roots. Interestingly, despite identifying themselves as (at least partially) "Canadian", these youth often used the terms "Canadian" and "white" interchangeably. Participants typically described themselves as hyphenated Canadians, but in their discussions around what it means to be "Canadian" and what it means to be "South Asian", "Canadian" and "white" appear to be equivalent.

I'm Canadian. I was born in Kenya, but I'm Canadian. But saying that it's almost like I'm not Canadian though. For legality purposes I'm Canadian, but I don't know...My parents will joke (with me when I say certain things), like "Oh, but now you're *Canadian*". I don't know, you're Canadian to some extent but...I've seen other people who are definitely more influenced by the Canadian world. I think I have still retained a lot of my roots. My cousin, for example, he has all white friends. I think that makes the biggest difference: who you hang out with. If I didn't have all my Indian friends I wouldn't definitely be as...I think I am pretty Indian. I'm on all these (committees), I go to Indian things, I'm almost too much, it's almost like I've left the Canadian stuff...Being Canadian, I don't know, for me I don't think I'm as Canadian as...My cousin for example, he has his white friends, he's almost become white washed is the term. (R: So being Canadian...is that synonymous with white to you?). I think so, I think that's how I see it, so I don't know if that's right or anything. (Anita)

This contradiction is somewhat resolved when youth made reference to the importance of geography in determining the way they see themselves nationally. For many participants, while here in Canada, the South Asian national identity is critical, and necessitates the use of the hyphen. When in other parts of the world, especially in India, youth described seeing themselves as "the other", as fully Canadian.

My nationality would be Canadian, because that's where I was born, it's where I'm from. When I go somewhere else from here, I don't think about going to India or going wherever...I always think I want to go back to Canada, because this is my home. But at the same time, I'm not Canadian when I'm here. When I'm here, when you say "Canadian", usually you're talking about Canadian people, like white people, and here I'm Indian. If people ask me here, "What are you"?, I'll be like "I'm Indian". But if I go to the States, I'll say I'm Canadian. It's really strange. The Canadian-ness isn't something that I think about all the time, but it's always there. Like when the Olympics were on, then you suddenly become all Canadian, and then when they're done, it wouldn't cross your mind to describe as Canadian. It's weird. I am Canadian in a lot of ways because I really appreciate a lot of the stuff that we have here, and...I'd rather be Canadian than anything else. But I don't...It's not something that...When I'm here, it's weird. I would never say I'm just Canadian. I'd say I'm Indian-Canadian, or South Asian-Canadian...The hyphen is always there. When I'm somewhere else I'm just Canadian. (Amir)

Ethnicity and Culture

Although within the formal literature, “ethnicity” and “culture” have different meanings, the youth in this study used these terms interchangeably. Participants referred to their ethnicity/culture as “Indian” or “South Asian”, but emphasized that this is not a homogeneous category where all individual members share similar characteristics. Rather, the Indian/South Asian ethnicity/culture is quite diverse. This diversity is typically expressed through the language(s) people speak, the food they eat, and the different cultural activities in which they take part.

I’m African because I was born there. Some of the music I listen to, and some of the food that I eat, even some of the language that I speak has an African component to it. However, culturally, I’m more Indian. That’s more my culture. I listen to Indian music, I watch Hindi movies, I’ve done classical Indian dancing, the food that I eat is mainly Indian, but because I was born in Africa, some of it is Indian food that’s a little changed. Like some of the curries that we have, people from India might never have heard of. It’s like the African edition...like it’s a culture on its own. It’s not quite Indian, and it’s not quite African. It’s like being both. (Jamila)

Despite this variability, however, individuals who share an Indian/South Asian ethnicity/culture share certain common “roots”. These are expressed in the similar values and norms.

(R: Culturally, what makes you different, if you’re a Punjabi person, from other Indians?). Language, food, dress, clothing...(But) I think the values are the same. All of my friends are all different too...we have Hindus, and Muslims, Ismailis, Gujuratis...When I go to their house, I feel like it’s the same. It might be a different language, and different food, but it’s the same pretty much. (Rekha)

These common values and norms are typically transmitted through the family. This value base, rooted in the family, is seen as the critical foundation that informs important life decisions, including those related to the selection of future mates. In this way, distinctions based on ethnicity/culture can form the basis of powerful

inclusionary/exclusionary dynamics between Indian/South Asian individuals, and members of the broader society.

...Family's really important in our culture, so it would be too uncomfortable if (I married) somebody of a different culture... There would be so many things that they'd have to understand, or that they wouldn't understand. Like the language, or certain customs... I understand (my parents') perspective, that they would want me to marry someone as close to my culture as possible because otherwise, (it would be too hard for that person to fit in with us). I don't know if that includes... you can't be too specific, as far as finding a Sri Lankan, but they have to be compatible, like the language, Tamil... (Vijay)

It's just that it seems like everybody who's South Asian thinks the same way in terms of things like that. And I don't know... Our sense of community—we hang out together... All this stuff seems to bring us together, like bonding. There are differences, but they don't seem like that big a deal. And it seems like we're different from everyone else, so that's why we kind of stick together. (Amir)

Other Relevant Identity Dimensions

Participants also identified themselves using several dimensions that were not outlined in the interview protocol. These include “child of immigrants”, “student”, “family member” (e.g., daughter, sister), and identities created through extracurricular activities like sport or dance.

I think there are certain experiences that (my friends who are white) never had, like having parents with a different, *really* different experiences and values from them... I think when you're the child of immigrants, you get... You're a part of this country and you're also a part of the country your parents came from, whether you admit it or not. (R: Can you think of an example that might illustrate how the experience of someone with immigrants as parents versus someone whose parents were brought up here might be different?). I think I would say the influence someone's parents have over them. If someone was born here and their family had been here for a while, I would probably assume that they wouldn't have as much influence as someone whose parents were immigrants... I guess I think of children of immigrants as having parents that are... I guess I just think of them as sort of struggling with their parents in... what the kind of relationship they have with them is like. I think that's kind of common with all my friends who are children of immigrants. And that's something I've noticed with my friends who aren't children of immigrants, who are just kind of generic Canadians... they just don't seem to have the same kinds of issues about their relationship with their parents. (Meera)

It (my student identity) means (I) come to school take care of business, because that's (my) number one priority and those numbers that (I) generate now will define pretty much the rest of (my) life. Being a student is very important to me and being good at school is very important to me. (Dilip)

Nowadays, because both my brothers live with me now in Ottawa, I'm the big brother, and that's a big thing. I guess it means...I'd like to be someone my brothers could go to when they need anything, or someone that would protect them if there are any problems. A good brother would be a good friend too, and I want to be the person like...even if it's something stupid, like about a girl, or about school, or whatever, that my brothers will come to me and ask me about it, and not be afraid of that. For me, it's to kind of make sure that everything I know about them, everything they're doing...just making sure they're okay. I don't want anything to happen to them...So protecting them. (Amir)

I'm a bharathanatyam dancer, so for me, that's a lot of how I identify myself, because I've danced forever. That's just huge for me...It's a lot of the artistic stuff that really doesn't get portrayed anywhere else. (Rani)

Clearly, from youths' descriptions of the various dimensions above, these elements (i.e., race, gender, class, etc.) are not independent and discrete portions of their identities. Instead, these dimensions are related in complex, meaningful ways. For example, many participants suggested that for South Asians, religion and ethnicity/culture are so intricately connected that it is difficult to determine whether the roots of certain values and practices are religious or cultural. Particularly for practicing Ismailis and Hindus, religion pervades all aspects of cultural life, and so making this kind of distinction is a difficult, and in some ways meaningless task.

Another example of this complex interaction between identity dimensions is the intersection between race or ethnicity/culture and gender. Many female participants talked about how their sense of being a woman is tied directly to their South Asian-ness. This involves behaving according to parental/community expectations of what it means to be a "good South Asian girl", like being modest, introverted, respectful, and "not so

friendly with guys”. These expectations, however, have shifted, as gender and ethnicity/culture have intersected with time and place. Specifically, in the present generation, here in Canada, parents and the broader South Asian community seem to be supporting a new set of behavioural expectations that includes more independence and freedom among young South Asian women.

I think that women are definitely viewed differently now than when my mom was my age, let's say. There are a lot more opportunities; they don't have to fight as hard to be taken seriously. They are pretty much equivalent to men... We think a lot differently than I'd say my mom's generation... We're more independent in thought, I think. We're trying to push boundaries; we're not as accepting of what we're told... We have our own opinion...(and don't) just accept what is told to us. I'd say we have very high goals and expectations for ourselves and we have a different concept of what's right and wrong I'd say. (For example), in relationships... I'd say (in) my mom's generation, when she was my age, it would be looked down upon if a woman were to be dating or just basically spending time alone with people of the opposite gender. And I think these days, South Asian women are more likely to do things like that... Dating has always been a norm among North Americans, but it is relatively new to South Asians being accepting of people dating. It's a phenomenon that's been happening over I'd say the past ten, fifteen years. (Deepa)

The interaction between race or ethnicity/culture and gender is not always positive. According to one participant, the combined effect of being 1) a woman who is 2) South Asian *and* 3) a Muslim (especially post 9/11) puts her at greater risk for discrimination here in Canada, than being any one of those things alone:

I think that (I'm)...disadvantaged first of all by being a Muslim...because of all the media and all the stuff. And secondly by being a Pakistani and thirdly by...being a woman. I think those three things have hit me in the past couple of years...(I see it) in my program. They are all white people, so me being the only (woman), being the only Muslim, the only Pakistani, the only brown person in the class. I find that to be quite hard, I get a lot of stares...(there's) a lot of ignorance that I've noticed.... (Farah)

Here, race and gender are discussed as being linked, not in an additive way, but in a more complex way that places young South Asian-Canadian women at a disadvantage.

Some youth feel that when brown skin is combined with the female gender and the Muslim religion, individuals experience discrimination based on the combined effects of these three identity dimensions. This is not simply an additive discrimination, where race + gender + religion = disadvantage, but rather is a complex process of “interlocking oppressions”²⁴.

It is important to note that this multiplicity of identity dimensions exists not just *across* the categories described above, but also *within* these categories. For example, as described above, within the larger category “gender”, youth distinguished between what it means to be a “good South Asian girl” and what it means to be a “Canadian” woman, moving between these dimensions depending on the situation. In the next section, I focus on a particularly interesting set of participants’ national identities: the Canadian and the South Asian.

Identity as Flexible

As discussed in the previous section, when asked to describe their identities with reference to nationality, many youth used the term “South Asian-Canadian” or “Indo-Canadian”. Even when participants did not *explicitly* use this hyphenated term, throughout the interviews, participants communicated an implicit sense of embodying *both* South Asian and Canadian characteristics. The goal of Research Question #2 was to explore this duality in more detail, by inviting youth to describe the South Asian and Canadian national identities in greater detail. In examining their responses, it becomes clear that despite emphasizing the differences between what it means to “be Canadian” or

²⁴ The notion of “interlocking oppressions”, (a concept introduced by feminist writer Patricia Hill Collins), will be explored more deeply in the Chapter 5, the Discussion section.

to “be South Asian”, youth move freely between these identifications, choosing to reflect one or the other, depending on the context and life circumstances. This suggests then, that participants’ identities are flexible, and change both across situations as well as over their lifetimes.

Differences between “Canadian” and “South Asian” Identities

In describing the two main national identities, youth compared what it means to be Canadian, and what it means to be South Asian with reference to 5 key areas: activities, race, focus of lifestyle, values, and family dynamics. These distinctions are explained in greater detail below.

Activities

Activities that youth described as being “Canadian” were focused mostly on recreation, like being involved in winter sports (skating, skiing, hockey), doing “outdoorsy” things, watching television, taking part in winter festivals, going out to bars and clubs, and going to movies and restaurants. Along with going to school and hanging out with friends, these activities were referred to as being “normal”, everyday types of things that most participants do. Activities that youth described as being South Asian were typically more “ethnically/culturally” focused, like eating culturally-specific foods, enjoying popular culture from India, socializing with other South Asians, speaking a South Asian language, taking part in festivals and religious celebrations, and participating in ethnically-oriented extra-curricular activities (e.g., bharthanatyam dance).

Participants discussed how it is sometimes considered “odd” (by both mainstream and South Asian-Canadians) when South Asian-Canadian youth take part in “Canadian” activities (e.g., skiing, playing hockey in a league). It is equally unusual, however, for

South Asian-Canadian youth to *not* take part in “South Asian” activities. This garners much judgment from other South Asian-Canadian youth.

People—like my South Asian friends here—they’re like “Do you watch Hindi movies”? That’s a common question, and I don’t. I don’t understand Hindi. They’re like “How can you not watch Hindi movies? They’re so great”. They’re long and it’s the same plot every time...I find it boring. That’s when people are like “Oh, you’re so whitewashed”, and this and that. (Sanjay)

Race

Participants also referred to differences in race as distinguishing “Canadians” from “South Asians”. Participants described being “white” as engaging in certain activities and behaving in “Canadian” ways (e.g., playing hockey, exercising one’s independence), while being “brown” as doing specific things and behaving as a “South Asian” (e.g., watching Hindi movies, respecting elders). For participants, then, “white” and “Canadian” are equivalent categories, while being “brown” is interchangeable with “South Asian”. This is confusing, however, because (as described in the previous section), although most “brown” youth make this distinction, they also self-identify as “Canadian”. It appears that despite using the terms “white” and “Canadian” synonymously, these youth believe that one can *also* be Canadian if s/he takes part in those activities and behaves in ways described as “Canadian”. Membership in the group “Canadian”, however, is a tenuous one, because unless you actually *are* white, there is a limit to how “white” one should act.

(I went to high school) here, in Ottawa. I’ve lived here all my life...But I’ve been to India...and I like listening to Indian music and stuff...I’m sure you’ve heard the term “white wash”? I would have been considered somebody who was white washed in high school...From the outside, if you saw me and you saw my (white) friends you would have automatically assumed I was white washed. (Ashima)

Lifestyle

Youth often referred to lifestyle differences between “Canadians” and “South Asians”, describing how the focus of everyday life varies between members of each group. For Canadians, recreation and leisure are emphasized, while for South Asians, the focus tends to be on studying and working hard in general. Participants in this study explained how they attempt to find a balance between these two extremes so that they work very hard in school, but also find time for relaxing activities.

Indians have a very structured way of living. They have very goal-oriented lives, I find. I don't have a lot of Indian friends—I'll admit that—because I tend to identify more with Canadian people. The Indians that I do know are always very goal oriented, whatever that goal might be...All the Indian people that I know do very well in school...Obviously (there are) exceptions...(but in general), there are no resting moments for them. They take time out of their day to watch TV, but it takes significantly less time out of their lives for luxury than generally Canadians do...(I will admit that) I am very academic scientifically...Last night I was studying 'til 3 in the morning just because it is really important for me to get good grades, whereas I don't suppose the average Canadian person would do that.
(Dilip)

Values

The lifestyle differences above can be traced to more general differences in values that distinguish “Canadians” from “South Asians”. Youth discussed how, for example, South Asians place great value on formal education and getting good grades, while Canadians have a broader vision of learning that includes exploring one's interests and the importance of having “life experiences”. Participants also oriented to the notion of respect for elders, and how this concept is viewed differently between South Asians and Canadians. Again, youth described making attempts to find a balance between Canadian and South Asian values, locating themselves somewhere between the two extremes.

My attitude is definitely more Canadian than my parents...Just the way that the respect that people out here have for their parents...Don't get me wrong, I have a

lot of respect for my parents, but the way that traditionally, in Indian families, kids respect their parents, there's very little argument. There's no talking back, and...I know that back as a teenager, I was talking back a lot, but now I find that my parents themselves have well-thought out arguments. They're very...How do I put it...They're very structured, and they have a lot of...it's very calm. There's not as much yelling. It's very healthy. It's a healthy relationship. And I don't know if in the traditional Indian sense, if that's very normal...there it's more strict obedience with children. (Sanjay)

Family Dynamics

According to these youth, perhaps the greatest distinction between “Canadians” and “South Asians” is reflected in their differing views on the family. In general, there is less family influence on decision-making, less strictness among parents, and more negotiation between parents and children in Canadian families than in South Asian families. For example, participants described how influential South Asian parents and extended family members can be in terms of selecting future mates, or choosing what to study in university. This involvement, however, comes with support (whether financial or emotional) that is not usually available to Canadian youth.

(Canadians are) a little more laid back. I don't know...my parents are pretty strict. I guess (Canadians are)...more lenient, I think. I think they're more democratic. So I have Canadian friends, white friends, and their parents are like “Okay, let's talk about this and meet on common ground”...Like, say you're going out to a party, they're like “Okay, 2 is a little too late, so be home around 12 or 1”, but ours is like “Ten or nothing”. You know what I mean? So I guess the whole, more leniency, they discuss things so that everyone's okay with it. That's more Canadian parenting, I guess. (Shalini)

(In) brown families in general, we keep our kids close to us, we want to nurture them, we want to teach them, give the best for them and make them grow, and when they are ready we let them go into the world....We can teach him better (than anyone else). (But white people) think that by letting someone else teach them, less worries for them the better. I don't think they so much understand the close bond you can have. I'm not saying they don't love their kids. I'm going to generalize when I say this, but...I can stay with my mom or dad for as long as I want...they're not going to kick me out when I'm done university. A lot of white kids in general, they move out when they finish high school, when go to university, when they finish university. Their parents say “It's time for you to

move out”. They want them to start their own lives. My parents would never say that to me. I can start my own life when I am living with my family... We are only on the planet for a certain time, and they brought us into this world and they want to keep us with them for as long as they can. So, their ideal is to keep us with them until marriage, or until we’re ready... My mom used to be like that, used to have that mentality. Since she’s been dating this (Canadian/white) guy, four years now, she’s changed. She’s gone on that path “So after university you’re moving out right?” I’m like “Excuse me?” I’d bring this up to my grandmother and she says “Don’t worry, you’re staying there. If anything happens you come live with me”. My mom and my grandmother don’t talk so much anymore, ever since this guy’s come into the whole thing. No one in our family really likes him. (Jamal)

Again, youth make attempts to reconcile these differences in values by drawing from both national identities, and negotiating space somewhere in the middle.

I don’t disregard what (my parents) say...they have more experience than me. I do respect their intelligence... That is tempered with the fact that I’m not stupid myself. I will make my own judgment, and take what they say under advisement, but their (role in my) decision-making... is minimal at that. (For example), I almost joined a frat, (in my) first year of university, just because I saw what it was in movies. If you’ve seen the movie “The Skulls” or “Animal House”, (it’s actually) much closer to “The Skulls” than it is “Animal House”. So I was thinking in terms of “Animal House” and they were living in terms of “The Skulls”. My parents were 100 percent against the idea. My father said he would cut off all financial ties to me if I joined the frat, because he saw the frat as a money suck. He wasn’t entirely wrong on that, (but) I think he took it to an extreme. Despite their extreme objections, I said “I’m sorry you guys think this way” and continued to progress and to join the frat. Subsequently, I found out that it wasn’t so much the party as it was the elitism and it didn’t appeal to me. So I didn’t join... It did occur to me that “Dad will be happy and Mom will be happy”, but it was definitely not the deciding factor. The deciding factor was the fact that it seemed like you were paying to make friends. (My parents are basically) another resource (when it comes to decision-making). I respect their opinions as much as I respect an equally intelligent friend’s opinion—someone who (has) my best interests at heart, and had the ability to a certain extent, to apply those interests to my life, but who is in the end not the deciding role. (Dilip)

*Shifting Across Situations:
Moving Between the National Identities in Different Contexts*

Although they discuss, at length, the differences in activities, focus of lifestyle, values, and family dynamics between “Canadians” and “South Asians”, South Asian-Canadian youth clearly associate themselves with *both* national identities. Many

participants talked about how within a Canadian context, they feel free to express both their Canadian and South Asian identities, and do not feel bound to either one. They discuss how, especially when compared to places like the United States, Canada supports the expression of one's ethno-racial roots or background, as well as their cultural present. This allows youth to blend elements from both cultures to create a third, hybrid national identity called "South Asian-Canadian".

I am both (South Asian and Canadian). Having been born here, whether it's just on paper or whether it's my opinion...I *am* Canadian. And I have lived here all my life and I've been able to adopt a lot of the practices, a lot of the traditions, and a lot of the everyday activities that they do here, and I like them. I would live here (in Canada), given any choice of anywhere...and I am Indian—I've never been ashamed of it, I've never once denied it...Being Indo-Canadian really to me means being able to combine the two nationalities. We have sort created this. I think people here, they aren't Indian and they're not Canadian. They are a mix of the two. (Ashima)

Actually, (religion) is a large factor in my life...And people look at me, and they're always so shocked to hear that I do (religious things like fasting), because I appear to be so, what everyone calls, "whitewashed", and I'll admit I am, but...It just shows how I incorporate my culture and my Canadian identity together. I don't have to give up certain things to be Canadian—that's what it means to be Canadian, because you can still keep what you want from your own culture, and what you still believe in, and still be Canadian. (Shafreen)

I'm Canadian born and I respect the Canadian values and cultures but yet I also have the Indian values and cultures and I respect them as well. So I'm trying to juggle both...I think that (in addition to being South Asian or Canadian), there's another category that's falling in between...I know a lot of people that can handle both of them equally—smart people, but yet they still have a good time, party and everything...I think there's another group that's on it's way to formulating with my generation. (Chitra)

While this process of finding a reasonable balance between the two national identities can be a difficult, tension-producing process at times, for these participants, there is no need to choose between being exclusively "South Asian" or "Canadian".

Instead, both can co-exist, in a productive and positive way, and are expressed to varying degrees both across situations and over one's lifetime.

This movement between the two national identifications is evidence of the adaptive nature of youths' identities. Youth are able to enter situations and either "be Canadian" or "be South Asian", depending on its characteristics. Below, I describe specific situations or contexts in which youth identified feeling either more Canadian or more South Asian.

Feeling More Canadian

Youth discussed how their feelings of Canadian-ness are tied to simple things, like participating in certain activities (i.e., doing "Canadian" things), and expressing certain values (i.e., a focus on individualism).

Our family, I think, is not very brown...I wouldn't say (we're) more white, but more ... my mom and dad both drink, (and in) some Indian families that's totally looked (down) upon. Just (doing certain) things like going on vacations, like Florida—most parents would go to India or something, we went to Florida. I'm not saying if you're brown you're not going to go on vacations, but I'm saying the activities you do, such as going snorkelling, going swimming, those kinds of things, playing sports. I was on the curling team, that's pretty Canadian. Stuff like that. (Anita)

I find growing up here, (there's more focus) on the individual. I have a lot more individuality, a little more control over what I want to do compared to a lot of (people from India). A lot of them, they don't really have much of an option. For me, my parents originally forced me—not "forced me", but really directed me into Computer Engineering. And my mother's a doctor, my father's an engineer...classic. So my brother did the medicine, and I got directed into the engineering. I hated it after a year. They weren't happy about it at first, but I think they realized that they can't decide what I want to do. So I think that was another big thing, because if one of my cousins in India tried to pull a stunt like that, I don't think they would have the moxy to actually do it. (Mahesh)

Participants discussed how their sense of Canadian-ness is tied to “regular things”, like going to school, daily living. This is especially true when they are around “Canadians” (i.e., people who are white).

Honestly, my day-to-day life, I don't really think about being different...(like), while you're in class you're just like everybody else. You have your friends in your university classes that you do your group projects with...I don't feel Indian at work. Before I worked at (Parliament Hill) I was working at Foot Locker. And everybody was great there, you know...you're the only brown person there, which is totally great. It doesn't hit you until somebody else points it out. (Samira)

If I'm around Pakistani people...I become a little bit more Pakistani, where I'm using the language a bit more, dressing differently, acting a little bit more different...I find that...especially when I go to their houses, I sort of stay away from (the men)...I won't go talk to them, (I'll) stay more with the women. But when I'm (feeling) Canadian, I talk to everyone, I talk to guys I talk to girls. I'm more comfortable. (Farah)

The role others play in shaping one's sense of Canadian-ness is clearly important. For some participants, being around South Asians from India (compared to South Asian-Canadians) makes them feel more “Canadian”.

(Being around Indians from India)...they bring out the Canadian-ness in me. Not that they're being mean—they're just pointing (differences) out. Like when I speak in Hindi sometimes, they syntax confuses me because English syntax and Hindi syntax is totally different. So they'll make fun of that, or sometimes I'll get the Khans confused, like Sharu Khan or Ali Khan, or whoever it is...I get them confused every once in a while, so they make fun of me. Little things like that. But I do feel more Canadian at that point, because they've grown up (in India and I've grown up here in Canada). (Rani)

Feeling More South Asian

Youth describe feeling more South Asian while participating in certain “South Asian” activities (e.g., eating certain foods, watching Bollywood movies). Feeling South Asian is also connected to certain values that are informed by their ethno-racial background. This includes having a high level of parental influence in their lives, feeling

pressure to achieve academically or occupationally, valuing family, and for some, having an intense focus on religion.

I think I would say the influence someone's parents have over them...If someone was born here and their family had been here for a while, I would probably assume that they wouldn't have as much influence as someone whose parents were immigrants...I guess I just think of them as sort of struggling with their parents...I think that's kind of common with all my friends who are children of immigrants, and that's something I've noticed with my friends who aren't children of immigrants, who are just kind of generic Canadians...they just don't seem to have the same kinds of issues about their relationship with their parents...I don't know if it's just because they've basically grown up in the same culture and so there are a lot of things that don't really have to be negotiated...the parents and the kids have the same basic outlook on a lot of things, like dating, going to school, that kind of thing. (Meera)

I find that South Asians are very family-oriented...A lot more family-oriented than North Americans. We have large families and we spend a lot of time with them. I think it is important to basically keep in touch, and spend time with your family because it is part of who you are and we understand that they're the people that will always be there for you...I'd also say we have a lot of respect for people who are knowledgeable or older than us...I just think that we are very patient in the way that we listen and we try to learn from people and we try to emphasize that in our daily activities. (Deepa)

Again, these youth pointed to the importance of others in shaping how Canadian or South Asian they feel. For some youth, being around other South Asians intensifies youths' "South Asian-ness", given the similarities in race, dress, etc. This results in feelings of comfort, connectedness, pride, and self-confidence. Being around other South Asians helps many participants to feel like part of a group where their South Asian-ness is not highlighted in a negative way, but rather it is seen as a normal, "regular" aspect of identity.

Whenever I'm with my South Asian friends, there's like this special bond...You just feel closer and together because you know that they know where you are coming from. So if you tell them "Oh, my mom didn't let me do this, she's not letting me go here", they'll be like "Yeah, I understand because my mom's the same way". With another person, a Canadian person, they'll be like "Oh, why is your mom acting like that? What's the problem, my mom lets me do this all the

time.” I just feel like they know where we are coming from, and that’s that special bond, it’s just easier that way to communicate between South Asian people.
(Chitra)

... When I’m participating in my own cultural events, then I don’t feel South Asian...I feel...when I’m attending like a Diwali or whatever...I feel like I’m part of the rest of them...I feel really regular. Like, yes, I’m South Asian, and I’m proud of that, but at the same time, everybody around me knows I’m South Asian, and I’m not being stared at, so it’s not like it’s a big thing...It’s just something that’s there...No one’s going to come up to me and verbalize, in the Gurudwara, and say “Are you South Asian?” They’re going to say “You’re Punjabi, you’re Indian, (and) you’re Sikh. We know that, and we’re all here and similar”. (Jasbir)

Other youth discussed how they feel most South Asian when they’re with Canadians, or people who are white. This is mostly because others tend to orient to their South Asian-ness. The result of making this distinction is a feeling of difference and separateness from those around them (i.e., they feel like their Indian-ness causes them to “stick out” more when they’re surrounded by white people). Here, their South Asian-ness is something “curious” or “interesting” in a way that sets them apart from others.

Places full of white people... Well, they make me feel *different*...I feel more South Asian in an uncomfortable way when someone pulls the whole “Oh, I love saris. Do you do henna?” or... When I was in university and maybe there was a lecture being given by an Indian person, and I would look around and I’d be one of the only Indian people in the room, so therefore, I was supposed to have a special understanding of what was going on. So I guess, yeah, there are often times where I feel more South Asian, but not really in a comfortable way, or in a way I’m initiating on my own. (Meera)

I would...get those questions (from white people) about, you know, “What are you? Where are you from?” you know?...Whereas if I was a regular...Like, an ordinary white Canadian, I don’t think I would get those questions. I don’t mind the questions, but as long as...For me, sometimes I can’t even answer them. It might be a really difficult one, like “Oh, can you do this?” or “What’s arranged marriage to you?” and then it’s like when you’re explaining it, you don’t want to feel dumb, you don’t want to feel like...And if they don’t understand, you feel even more weird because then they’ll be like...If they tell their friends, then what are they going to think of us? What are they going to think of me? (Jasbir)

*Shifting Over the Lifetime:
The Evolving Nature of Identity Over Time*

As described above, the process of negotiating this hybrid “South Asian-Canadian” identity can be challenging and stressful. This, however, is an adaptive process that is made possible by the flexible nature of identity. Participants in this study discussed how they struggle to reconcile the dichotomy that exists between many activities, values and behaviours considered “South Asian” or “Canadian”, and work to make decisions about which aspects fit best with other identity dimensions. This negotiation is not an isolated event, but rather is a process that takes place at numerous points in one’s lifetime. By negotiating and re-negotiating their identities, youth are able to adapt to changing circumstances, and re-think important issues around “being Canadian” and “being South Asian” when previous ways of being are no longer successful.

In addition to shifts that take place across situations, then, participants discussed how their relative sense of Canadian-ness or South-Asian-ness has changed over the course of their lifetimes. While shifts in identity occur to different degrees at various points in youths lives, most participants in this study described engaging in a conscious process of negotiation/re-negotiation at 2 main points in their lives thus far: 1) during their childhood when they first became aware of the ethno-racial differences between themselves and members of the mainstream culture, and 2) during the adolescent/young adult years when they began to confront identity issues more generally.

Negotiation/Re-negotiation of Identity During Childhood

These youth described the first instance of identity negotiation/re-negotiation as having occurred early on, when as children, they became aware of the ethno-racial

differences between themselves and members of the mainstream culture. Being “brown” was usually something that participants were aware of from an early age, but the distinction between “brown” and “white” was of little consequence. These differences became meaningful, however, when another person 1) named the racial difference, and 2) made certain (typically negative) attributions based on this distinction, with consequences for social inclusion/exclusion. Participants discussed being surprised and hurt when these distinctions were made clear, as this challenged their previously held assumption that they were just like “other Canadians”.

(When I was 6 years old), in my class, there was one Chinese guy and me, and that’s it...Everybody else was white...It felt different. People always say that kids are so cruel, and it’s true in a way, because they notice things. Now, looking back on it (so many) years later, I can see why it happened. They (other school kids) noticed I was different from them, and I guess they kind of...Because they’d never seen anyone that wasn’t white, right, except the one Chinese guy...So they’re like “What are you? What’s wrong with you? Why are you so dark”? And I’m like “I don’t know”...I distinctly remember the first day of school, when I asked someone “Can I borrow your glue” to make a craft, they were like “No, because you’re going to make it all dirty”, and I was like “Why”? and they said “Because you’re all dark”. And that felt really bad. That was probably the worst day of my life. I was crying when I got home...They saw that I was dark and didn’t know why. (Amir)

This process of becoming aware of the ethno-racial differences separating them from mainstream Canadians had one of two outcomes: participants either became exceedingly proud of their South Asian-ness and identified more strongly with other brown people, or conversely, worked to minimize their South Asian-ness as a way of seeking acceptance from their mainstream peers.

I had an incident when a racist remark was made towards me. I was just walking with my Greek best friend on the playground, and this guy, he said “What are you staring at, you f-ing paki”? And so it just hurt. I take these things seriously. I started crying and I told my dad what happened, and he wrote a letter to the school, and this and that, and the guy got suspended, and I was like “Why would he say that”? Because I was on the soccer team, I was...It shouldn’t matter what

colour I am. I'm a person. And so that sort of made me realize that maybe I'm a little different...I guess that made me more proud of who I was because I was like, "You know, you don't do that"...I've always known (I was different)...You see your skin, you know? And you see that you go to mosque and they don't. They have Christmas, and you don't. Through school, you learn about these things. They also teach you in school also that everybody's equal, so that's always drilled into your head that "Yeah, that's what I am, but it doesn't matter. I can have a white best friend, I can have a black best friend, it doesn't matter". But then when someone insults you, it's like "What are you doing? You're crossing that line". It was kind of shocking. It wasn't that I was mad at what he said, it's just that when you don't know what's different, they're not used to that. So it's kind of like "Let's bring it out". So that's why I started doing Indian dancing, and in school, I started performing, and...when I did that, I guess (I) was trying to say "Wake up. We're here. But that doesn't make us any different than you. And maybe you can learn"...Because people fear what they don't know. (Jamila)

I was never really kept out of things. But at the same time, people would make jokes about Indian people to me...I wouldn't really be offended by them, but at the same time, I was like "They shouldn't be saying that". (R: What kinds of things would they say?). Just making an Indian accent, and saying "Oh, you're Brown", "You smell", things like that. I never smelled, so I was like "Oh, it's not me anyway, so I'll make fun of them too", and I used to do that...It didn't bother me until I started...I guess maturing mentally. I used to just make fun of them too. But about grade 11, grade 12, I started actually taking offence to it, because they're in no position to make anything that they don't know about. (Srikanth)

Negotiation/Re-negotiation During Adolescence/Young Adulthood

The second time a major negotiation/re-negotiation of Canadian and South Asian identities took place was during the adolescent and/or young adult years. Traditional literature in the area of identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968) sees this time as a period of "crisis" in identity that requires serious thought and reflection in order to move towards resolution and coherent sense of self. Consistent with this, participants discussed having experienced discomfort with the balance between their Canadian-ness and South Asian-ness at this time, and described exploring these identities in greater depth.

For some, this meant questioning their Canadian identity and moving towards their South Asian identity. This led to an increased sense of kinship with other South

Asians. Although participants often had different groups of friends, youth described experiencing a sense of “family” or connection among their South Asian friends that is absent in other relationships. Participants discussed how they no longer felt embarrassed about their South Asian-ness, because having South Asian friends (even from different religious groups or geographical areas) meant that they no longer had to justify not taking part in certain activities, or explain why their families are different than mainstream ones.

I think (my identity as South Asian) has definitely changed...In high school it started coming out more, because...up until grade 8, I...kind of didn't want to be South Asian...(I)t wasn't really a big part of me, just because I didn't really know a lot of Indian people in elementary school. There was only one South Asian guy in my class and I didn't even talk to him. It was all my Canadian friends, and that was good—I had a good time in elementary school. But when I went off to high school I met all these South Asian people, and they were kind of in the same step...we kind of came together and I think starting from high school that's when I felt my South Asian-ness come in more and...I feel now it's a huge aspect of my life. Before, it wasn't. (Chitra)

In other cases, however, participants began to question their South Asian identity, and challenged previously taken-for-granted ideas and values associated with this dimension. In these instances, the outcome was a move away from the South Asian, and a corresponding increase in youths' sense of Canadian-ness.

I think that when I was younger...I'd identify myself as Indian, and as I matured and started to think for myself a little bit, I kind of took a look around and thought “Why? Does it make sense?”. Why do I identify myself primarily as Indian when I've never lived (in India) in my life? I've visited a couple of times...(but) I might as well associate myself as being Algerian. What's the difference? I guess as I grew up, I kind of changed the way I thought...I think it was a gradual thing...As I grew up...I guess we call it “rebellion”...There's a certain point when you start to question what your parents say, and (it dawns on you) that maybe they're not always right. I think from then, (my questioning) was slowly building... (Harish)

When I was very young, when I had not been exposed to anything Western, and I was only (around my family), I was probably more Indian than I am now because...I was so influenced by my parents, (who) are more Indian than I am...(In junior high school), I was exposed to Western people, and (all of my friends) were white. My family was the only brown family in an entirely Irish-

Scottish area... When I reached grade five or six I was discovering myself for a period, (and) I rejected everything Indian and attempted to be as white as possible. (Dilip)

To this point, findings from Research Questions #1 and #2 have provided insight into the nature of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth.

Participants described these identities as 1) being comprised of multiple dimensions that are related to one another in complex and meaningful ways, and 2) having a flexibility that allows their identities to shift and change across situations and over time. Given this multiplicity, complexity, and flexibility, the focus of the next two sections is on how these identities are expressed. Findings from Research Question #3 show how the expression of one's identity is influenced by a variety of factors (e.g., personal motivations, relationship to family, relationship to South Asian community, and surrounding context), and findings from Research Question #4 focus specifically on how youth use their identities in interactions with others in their social environments.

Identity as Created and Re-Created

As described in previous sections, youths' identities are multiple and complex. In addition, youths' identities are flexible and therefore change across situations, and evolve over their lifetimes. While the previous two sections have focused on describing the *nature* of identity for participants in this study, the goal of Research Question #3 was to understand the processes underlying the *expression* of their identities. Participants in the present study described the expression of identity at any one time/place as the result of a process of creation and re-creation involving the interplay between 4 major elements: personal interests, the family, relationship with the South Asian community, and the nature of the surrounding context. These processes will be understood by drawing, once

again, from youths' descriptions of the shifting balance between the Canadian and South Asian national identities.

Personal Interests

Critical to the way one's identity is expressed are the individual's underlying personal interests. For many participants, the extent to which one's Canadian-ness or South Asian-ness is expressed changes throughout life, as a result of personal desires to learn more about and connect with either national identification. For example, some participants described questioning "being South Asian", something they had previously simply accepted as a natural part of their lives. For others who may have, to date, seen themselves as being more Canadian than South Asian, this re-creation of identity was the result of a desire to learn more about and connect with their cultural and/or religious roots.

I've been saying Bhagavad Gita slokas from 5 years old. I was memorizing slokas, doing speeches...I know the whole Mahabaratha, Ramayana, all these things...Until about 14, 15, I never really broke out of that and thought there is another world. I was really sheltered as a kid...I'd identify myself as Indian, and as I matured and started to think for myself a little bit, I kind of took a look around and thought "Why? It doesn't make sense. Why do I identify myself primarily as Indian when I've never lived in my life. I've visited a couple of times, (but) I might as well associate myself as being Algerian. What's the difference"? I guess as I grew up, I kind of changed the way I thought. (Harish)

My mother's really religious, and my dad isn't, so I kind of got both sides...I grew up knowing what my religion is about, pretty much, but it wasn't about faith or anything. And started to hang out with a couple of friends who are really religious—they're completely baptized and everything...Sikhism always seemed like one of the hardest religions to follow because you've got to give up meat, you've got to pray and all of that. So I never thought it was possible to do this. But then I saw a bunch of guys my age doing it, and I thought "Why not"? And after that, I slowly gave up something else, and picked up something else...So I'm kind of rounding out to being a religious kind of guy...(I used to go) clubbing every night, (drink a lot)...(I used to live) a very Toronto, very urban lifestyle...(This) was just a revelation that I had made. I realized that it's not hard to be Sikh, and it's something that...When I wasn't so religious, I thought it

would be something that I would get back to, get baptized, when I'm older. After that, I started thinking "Why not now"? (Gurpreet)

The Family

The family is another critical element in the process of shaping the expression of one's identity. According to participants, the family determines the way one's Canadian-ness or South Asian-ness is expressed since in addition to simply modeling South Asian activities, parents (and extended family members) are seen as transmitting South Asian values to youth. This affects youths' identities and influences their behaviours in important ways.

The whole (concept) of family's big to (South Asians)—that's who you have... when my parents grew up, that's all they had... Like, my mother, I know she wasn't allowed to go out as much we are. It would always be that she'd have to hang out with her sisters or her parents. It would always be family comes first. You eat dinner with your parents, you go to school you come back home, you don't go anywhere else. It's more like your parents are who you are *with*, kind of... If something happens, that's who you go to—(your) family... your parents, or your elders, and your aunt and uncles... It's been instilled (in me that) family is very important... if I need something I know I have my family to go to. (Ria)

Participants described the role of the family in shaping the expression of one's identity as so significant that a change in the family can create important changes in the extent to which South Asian and Canadian national identities are expressed.

The first few years I was a (bharthanatyam) dancer, I was a dancer kicking and screaming. I didn't want to be there, but my parents were very intent on instilling that into me. Extended family-wise, my grandparents only spoke Tamil to me, so that I would pick it up. My mom, she made sure that I knew how to cook an Indian meal properly... There was always this—not necessarily spoken—but there was always a huge appreciation for the "motherland". There was always Indian art around, Indian music on, and we only ate Indian food at home, and my parents always spoke Tamil to each other, and we always called home—by home I mean Madras—at least once a week... Whatever we did at home was very South Asian. That was when I was quite young. When I was in high school, my parents' marriage started falling apart, and as a result my brother and I sort of became hermits. And then I became very Canadian, because my family life fell apart. So I was quite Canadian at that point. (Rani)

Well, probably the influence of being South Asian has probably gotten less strong as I've gotten older. (After my parents' divorce), we didn't go to religious functions anymore. And then when my mother moved away... My father has no South Asian friends. He really... I don't know if I would say "avoided", but maybe kind of avoided having anything to do with the South Asian community, because when he got remarried, a lot of people were... Because he remarried a white woman, a lot of people weren't all that polite. (Meera)

Relationship with the South Asian Community

Participants identified one's relationship with other members of the South Asian community as having a considerable effect on the extent to which a person's South Asian-ness or Canadian-ness is expressed. In cases where youth have had a positive relationship with other South Asians, the resultant feelings of belonging, acceptance, and sense of community and shared values led to a high level of expressed South Asian-ness. For these individuals, "if you're brown, you're down... If you're Indian, you're Indian (and) you stick together" in a way that allows one's South Asian-ness to be valued.

(It's) being able to just... (When you're with your white friends), you don't get that feeling inside of... it's almost acceptance. And now when I tell stories to my (South Asian) friends, or when we tell stories, or talk about songs or movies... When you do that and they know what you're talking about, nothing feels better. We were doing that the other day—we were in a room where we could see into another room, and we were talking about the people (there), so (we didn't want them) to hear us so we spoke in Hindi... It's such a good feeling. (Ashima)

For others, however, mixed or ambivalent feelings about the South Asian community led to fewer ties with other South Asians, which then resulted in a lower level of expressed South Asian-ness. Whether because participants have felt judged or excluded by the South Asian community, the perceived lack of acceptance caused some of these youth to turn to and identify with members of the Canadian mainstream.

I guess I have a lot of negative associations with (the South Asian community), because I felt like... I guess when I was in high school, I was trying to be a bit of a bad-ass... I had my white boyfriends, and my coloured hair, and I would listen to

music that (was a little edgy)...I think a couple of parents thought I was a devil-worshipper or something...I really felt kind of alienated and I felt kind of some animosity towards typical Indian people...I would often, I think, be made to feel different, or excluded. (Meera)

The Surrounding Context

Participants also talked about how the nature of one's surrounding context can contribute to either a high or low expression of South Asian-ness or Canadian-ness. Youth described certain times in their lives when the absence of South Asians in their surroundings led to a lack of others to develop social and functional connections with. This lack of association with the South Asian community, as well as a desire to "fit in" with the mainstream created a low level of expressed South Asian-ness. In cases, however, where participants have had many South Asians in their immediate environment (or were in more ethno-racially diverse surroundings), increased opportunities to participate in the shared South Asian culture, as well as a general acceptance of diversity led to a stronger level of expressed South Asian-ness.

I believe in high school I think maybe (I) was more Canadian. Whereas in university I find (I'm) maybe more South Asian, because I have mosque here and we have a lot of events. And I find it more multicultural here, I guess maybe that's why I feel like I can relate that I'm more South Asian than Canadian. Whereas in high school, it was just it felt like I was more like (Caucasians)...I find that when it is more diverse you can just connect more with your roots... (Ria)

I was surrounded by a lot of white people (while I was growing up). All my friends from high school are white, not as many brown or ethnic groups. So I guess I just wanted to be more like them...But then I came (to university) and I see Indians all the time... You look at all the other people around here, and they embrace their faith, their culture, and it just makes you a little bit more aware of what was going on, and who you are as a person, because if other people can embrace it and not feel embarrassed, then why should you? (Sonali)

For these participants, expressions of identity are often linked to experiences with racism. Most participants shared having experienced some form of racism (either

systemic or occurring at the level of the individual) throughout their lives²⁵. For many of these youth, these encounters have made race a salient issue in their lives, and have shaped the expression of their identities in significant ways. In some cases, experiences with racism have caused youth to try to minimize their South Asian-ness in an effort to conform to the mainstream. More commonly, however, experiences of racism prompted participants to respond with increased pride in their ethnicity/race, and a desire to protect and express their South Asian-ness.

I had to go to ESL for some reason...even though my English is fine. So that aggravated me. It's another form of racism. So that put me apart from the mainstream...(When I started school), I automatically got put into ESL. And then my teacher wouldn't even ask me anything. I could speak proper English—I (was) *born* here and everything, (but) he just (ignored me)... Then I'd be out of it after 6 months, and then next year, I'd go to Grade 2 and be put back into ESL...(This continued to happen) up until Grade 4. (Gurpreet)

(I haven't experienced racism) recently...But (I did) a lot when I was growing up, when I was younger. I remember, especially one time when my dad and me were walking down the street and somebody called us Pakis... They started throwing snowballs at us. I was probably around 10, and we were just around the high school that it happened at, and my dad went into the school and talked to the principal. I think that was one of my first lessons on being Indian—no matter what, you have to stand up for yourself. You don't let other people belittle you in any way. I was so proud of my dad that he had actually gone into the school and talked to the principal, and sat that other girl down, and he gave her a piece of his mind... That was my first lesson, you know "Get yourself ready. If anybody disrespects you, you have to defend yourself, but with words, not by fighting... That's not going to get you anywhere". (Sonali)

Also critical to the expression of identity is the presence of discrimination *within* the South Asian community. Many participants discuss how exposure to prejudicial

²⁵ These encounters with racism are particularly difficult for youth to manage in a Canadian context that emphasizes the acceptance of and equality between all cultural groups. In these instances, then, youth are left without a sense of how to respond to issues that they are told (by the mainstream media, through prevalent cultural scripts) simply cannot exist in an egalitarian society where multiculturalism is a thing to be celebrated. This issue will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, the Discussion section.

attitudes and remarks from family members and South Asian friends has had an effect on the way they express their South Asian-ness or Canadian-ness.

Even now, I'll make fun of brown people, but it's different when you're doing it with other brown people. What was really funny was we had a (club) meeting, which is all brown people, in my apartment the other day, and I had 2 people stay over for the Grey Cup, and they were in the other room eating their dinner, and we were in our room discussing what was going on, and we were just saying that yeah, "We're brown, and we have 2 referees who are white who are coming in to referee the games", and we were like "Are we getting them any type of shirt or something to differentiate them", and we were like "No, no, it's not necessary, because they're white, and in a brown crowd you'll be able to tell and you'll be able to pick them out". And we all laughed at that, and later, my friends came out after the meeting and they were like "Brown people are worse than the KKK" because we tend to make fun of other cultures just as much as they make fun of us. He was just laughing about it...he was like "I can't believe you guys make so much fun of white people", but it's true...I think he was shocked that we sometimes...that we think about white people that way, and I didn't even realise that this would have affected him or offended him in any way...He was like "You guys were completely dissing white people in your whole 2 hours that you were talking"...So he was a little upset by it, but he was like whatever...It just shows that it doesn't matter what group you belong to, you're going to have biases to your group...I was a little shocked. I guess I didn't realize that that's how we portray ourselves to other people. I didn't even realize that was what we were doing. It becomes kind of second nature. (Sonali)

The Dynamic Interplay Between Factors

Based on participants' responses described above, it is clear that youths' personal interests, relationships with the family and with members of the South Asian community, as well as factors in the surrounding context are important in shaping particular expressions of identity. These factors can change at any time, and are differentially influential depending on an individual's particular circumstances. In addition, a change in one factor can trigger changes in any of the other factors. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from the interview with Farah:

I don't (think) I actually thought about who I was, or what my identity is until about five years ago...that's when I started university. I wasn't very Pakistani until (then). I think I am becoming more Pakistani (because) I'm speaking my

language more, I'm watching a lot more cultural Pakistani shows, listening to more Pakistani music...It's awesome, it really helped me get into my culture and stuff. My parents never really forced me to be Pakistani, never forced me to wear the type of clothes, to speak the language, get myself involved in Pakistani things... They sort of just let me do whatever I want. I think that kind of helped me because I made that choice, I want to be more involved. (R: What do you think made you want to make that transition?). Getting to university, finding that people are so ignorant...especially my program. I just became more proud of who I was, more proud of being Pakistani, that there's so much culture out there that I haven't seen, that I haven't absorbed. And I should. It is important. I consider myself lucky to be from somewhere else. (In high school) I did not expose myself at all to my culture...I wasn't too interested. I was more like "whatever, boring". But I think now...it (has) kind of hit me, (like) "Hey my culture is different, and it's important to me, and I would like to preserve it". I would like my kids to grow up knowing about my culture. (Farah)

According to this young woman, little emphasis within the family on "being South Asian" combined with living in a mostly "white" community led to relatively little expressed South Asian-ness in her younger years. The transition, however, from high school to university created increased opportunities for interactions with other South Asians, including her boyfriend. This sense of connectedness with a South Asian community, combined with moving to a more heterogeneous and culturally diverse environment, and a new interest in exploring her Pakistani heritage gave rise to greater expressed South Asian-ness in this individual. This greater expressed South Asian-ness, in turn, has created more opportunities for developing connections with other South Asians, and has also deepened her interest in both the South Asian culture, and her Muslim religion.

This example shows how an individual's personal interests, family circumstances, relationship to the South Asian community, and the nature of the surrounding context can interact in complex ways to shape the expression of a particular identity. The dynamic interplay between these elements produces an expressed identity that is responsive and

continually evolving, yet coherent and integrated at any one point in time/situation. The goal of the next section is to take a deeper look at how youth *use* these identities in interactions with others in their social environments.

Youth as Strategic in the Expression of their Identities

In the previous section, I described the dynamic interplay between 4 factors youth discussed as underlying particular expressions of identity (personal interests, the family, the relationship with the South Asian community, and the surrounding context). These expressions of identity are created and re-created over time and under specific circumstances. In order to gain a complete picture of this process, however, we need to understand the role of the actor. The goal of Research Question #4, then, was to attempt to understand how second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth use their identities in interactions with others in their social environments.

In the present study, youth described using particular expressions of identity strategically to achieve certain goals in social situations. More specifically, given that their identities are multiple, flexible, and shaped by the dynamic interplay between several key elements, youth discussed being able to assess a particular situation, determine the most appropriate “self” to foreground from an array of identity choices, and execute expressions of identity that will produce the outcome most in their favour. Drawing once again from examples of the ways youth describe their South Asian-ness and Canadian-ness, I will show how youth are able to negotiate between the two main national identities to express themselves in ways that are advantageous, beneficial, and consistent with their goals.

The Multicultural Canadian Context

As described in previous sections, participants in this study are proud to be “Canadian”, and feel that living in Canada allows them the freedom to practice and express their ethno-racial heritage, while sharing a larger, national “Canadian” identity. Despite this “Unity within Diversity” philosophy, however, second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth reported numerous instances in which others orient to the racial differences between them and “Canadians” (read “white” people), and make particular attributions based on these differences. While youth certainly shared having experienced overt racist acts, more common were subtle forms of racism that resulted in creating psychological distance between these youth from “real” Canadians.

Youth identified how this process takes on different forms. For example, a common response from “Canadians” to South Asian-Canadian youth is one of curiosity or fascination with their culture and their background. While mainstream Canadians might view this interest positively, and even see it as “invited” by the multicultural context, participants in this study described feeling as though these questions function to highlight racial differences in a way that makes them feel unequal to the majority. Further, it is assumed that youth are “experts” on what it means to be “brown”. Ultimately, this “orientalizing” works to create psychological distance between the individuals involved.

(At work this week, someone) was saying “I just love India...I love the culture.” And I was like “Oh, that’s nice.” She said “Oh, you *are* Indian, right?” and I was like “I guess.” I get that a lot. People will say “Oh, I love Indian food...” and...It’s a very strange feeling...I mean obviously I *look* South Asian, but people think that I’ve got some kind of basic primordial kind of connection to India...I think that’s really insulting. (Meera)

Another way that psychological distance is created between South Asian-Canadian youth and mainstream Canadians are questions about where youth are “really”, or originally, from. Again, although asking this question suggests an interest in one’s cultural background, youth shared feeling that this is yet another way of separating them from the mainstream, and suggesting that they are not *truly* Canadian the way that white people are.

When people ask you “Where are you from?”...It’s the most annoying question, because I know what they mean: “Okay, looking at the colour of your skin (you must be from somewhere else)”. So they want you to say “Indian”, “Sri Lankan”, “Pakistani”...But really what you want to say is “Canadian”. In the past, I’ve always said Pakistani, but now I try (to) say Canadian...But then when I say “I’m from Canada”, they’ll be like “What’s your origin? Where are your parents from?” (It irritates me) because they won’t accept me, they won’t see that I’m from Canada. They (think) “Okay, she’s (got) a different skin colour, so obviously...she’s from a different country.” They won’t right away say “Hey, she might be from Canada”...(Instead, they think) “She must be from somewhere else”. (Farah)

In addition to creating psychological distance between South Asian-Canadian youth and mainstream Canadians, participants talked about how inquiries like the ones described above put them in the role of “all-knowing”, where they are responsible for educating others about what it means to “be brown”. Participants conveyed feelings of resentment and frustration at being expected to assume the responsibility of being the “expert” or “educator”.

(We) had to do this project in French class in grade 4, and it was to (research) a country. So I chose some country in Africa...I don’t remember what country I chose, but my teacher said “No, do India”. And I said “Why should I do India”? And she said “Just do it”. So I went and I researched (it), and my mom made samosas and gave them out to the class and stuff like that...I guess she wanted me to educate them about it, so that started me make me realize that I was different...It turned out good. Now that I look back on it, I feel like it was a good thing that I did it...I learned a little bit about my culture, and it helped me...Those samosas were a big hit...everybody wanted the recipe from my mom, so it made me feel good. Everybody liked something that I knew about...(But it bugged me

because) I guess (the teacher), wanted me to educate everybody about it. At the time, I didn't like being told again "You're different"...And it was like "How come everybody else got to do what they wanted and I had to do what *she* wanted"? And you know, there's also the stigma of having the teacher telling you what to do and basically separating you out from the class. Like, why did *I* have to do that? Why didn't anyone else get told what country to do—why only me? Yeah, I didn't like it then, but what can I do about it now. It was not a big deal in the end, it all worked out, but I wasn't happy about it. (Amir)

The flip side of the "orientalist" interest expressed by some mainstream Canadians, however, is a blatant lack of interest in or acceptance of their ethno-racial and/or religious backgrounds. In these instances, participants described feeling psychologically distanced from the majority because of a general awkwardness or xenophobia expressed by some individuals.

...Just speaking to people, just conversing with people you find that you are not that important. (They don't convey it) directly...When I speak about my religion, when I speak about my culture, it's not important to them, it's not something that they are really (interested in) or they really look at it in a positive way. I get a lot of shock, people get shocked when they hear that (I'm Muslim)...It seems like they haven't really been exposed to that kind of thing. (Farah)

Youth suggested that ultimately, the interactions described above are simply attempts on the part of some mainstream Canadians to manage their discomfort around issues of race. Given the "multicultural rhetoric" that pervades Canadian society, perhaps these reactions to youths' ethno-racial background are how mainstream individuals feel they *should* act in response to such differences. For example, according to one participant:

I think people kind of dance around the issue of race, and they'll kind of bring up these, what they think are tame little cultural markers, like "Oh, I love Indian food". And I guess what they're really saying is "Oh, you're different from me, and I'm trying to deal with it as casually as possible". (Meera)

Against this cultural backdrop in which race and racial differences are salient for both these youth and their mainstream counterparts, participants talked about actively

assessing social situations, determining which expressed identity is most appropriate, and either “doing South Asian” or “doing Canadian” accordingly. Within this context, then, second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth have become “experts” in managing their social environments, and using their identities to produce the outcome most consistent with their goals.

“Doing South Asian”

When asked to discuss how they might use their identities in particular situations, youth often described “playing up” or “doing South Asian” in certain circumstances. Whether conscious or unconscious, participants talked about how “doing South Asian” is purposeful, and helps them to achieve specific goals or provides them with some advantage in particular environments.

For example, participants described gaining material advantages or enjoying certain “perks” as a result of foregrounding their South Asian-ness in the appropriate settings. This might involve speaking in a South Asian language with an Indian store owner to get a better deal on purchases, or using the “oriental interest” of some mainstream Canadians to turn a profit.

You know all those (Canadians) who are really into trying different “ethnic” things? Well, my friend and I decided “Wouldn’t it be smart for us to sell samosas at (the university)?”. And so...we got a table every week (at the University Centre), and we just used to sell samosas. We bought them for 3 for a dollar, but we’d sell them for a dollar each. And (those people) don’t know any better. (Some of our friends) would say “You should charge more”. It was so funny. Most of the people that would buy them were...the white people who were into all the different ethnic things, who were the people that were pro...those people that are really involved in political things and artsy things...Like the modern day hippie. And we could ride off that. We totally took advantage of the situation because we could. We had the means to do it and we did. (Rekha)

Youth also described “doing South Asian” in order to benefit from the networks or community connections among South Asians. Whether this involves sharing past exams, assignments, etc. while in university, or bypassing the line-up at a club where a South Asian person is the bouncer, these youth talked about how using these networks can make life much easier. According to one participant, this system works because of the shared notion of “us brown people, we have to stick together”.

Most (South Asians) have a connection either towards vehicles or merchandise...so the more (South Asians) you know, the wider your group is going to get, your network... I (use it) all the time... You have someone who wants something, and you know with your Indian-ness, you can get that thing. (An example) is when (our group) was having an event, like a Cards Night or a Movie Night or something... We didn't have a lot of money to do it, so we were asking for sponsors. We went to the WalMart, to Zellers...and nobody would help us out. But as soon as we went to the Indian community and we were like “Auntie, Uncle, can you help us with this and that”, they were more than willing to give it to (us). They were just willing to donate it to (us)...(That) was a big thing. That's how I use my Indian-ness to my advantage...through the networks. (Jayanthi)

As well, participants discussed gaining certain advantages in employment when playing up one's South Asian-ness. Feelings about this were mixed; on one hand, these youth want to be treated like everyone else and do not want to be given “special favours” because of their minority status. On the other hand, however, they feel entitled to take advantage of initiatives designed to repair the damage from discriminatory and exclusionary hiring practices (some of which may persist in different forms today) in many work settings.

I was applying for Canadian government jobs a couple of months ago, and I used to feel guilty about ticking off that I'm a visible minority... We were discussing this in a fourth year class... Some guy said “Sexism and racism don't really exist in Canada anymore”... And half the class immediately jumped down his throat... Most of the people in the class were white and female (except for) me and another South Asian girl... And so one of these (women) was saying “Every time I apply for a job and I don't get it, I wonder if I didn't get it because I am a

woman”, and I (when) I heard that, I was like “What?! Wait a minute... There are so many jobs that I’ve been way overqualified for, and I haven’t even heard back from them”...I (thought) “Maybe it’s because my name is (X X) and not Joanne Smith”...I used to send out 50 resumes and would hear back from 3 people, and I would apply for jobs I was way overqualified for, and I never really understood that. But then people probably saw the name on the resume and figured “Oh, she probably had someone write this resume for her, with a name like that”. Maybe that’s really cynical, but...now, I guess I don’t feel that bad about checking off that box. There’s no way of knowing how many times you’re going to be disadvantaged because of it, so if you have an opportunity to take advantage of it, maybe you should. (Meera)

Youth also described “doing South Asian” in order to re-gain the psychological power that is taken away from them during the incidents of subtle racism described at the outset of this section. Specifically, these youth talk about turning the tables to gain power, by taking advantage of the discomfort some mainstream Canadians experience when considering issues of race, in order to achieve their goals.

I’d get away with a lot of things (in high school), just because I think the administration didn’t want any trouble. I used to take advantage of it a little bit, but sometimes I’d just get really annoyed. Our school rules (were), like anywhere, if you don’t go to the school, you can’t go there...it’s trespassing. You can’t come around during class time and hang out. It’s trespassing and they’ll kick you out. (People got kicked out) all the time, but whenever *my* friends would come, nobody would say anything...The principal would (even) personally come to my classroom and be like “Oh, X, your friends are here, and they’re just waiting for you in the office”. I feel like I got special VIP treatment. (Rekha)

Perhaps most important to the participants in this study, however, are the emotional advantages they reported gaining from “doing South Asian”. Being able to express their South Asian-ness among other South Asian-Canadians (and South Asians) allows youth to achieve a sense of acceptance and belonging that they feel is not possible to experience within the larger, mainstream society. This sense of belonging is a unique feeling among those who “aren’t part of the norm”.

It also seems like people are a lot more readily accepting anyone who’s brown here. If you’re new and brown, it’s really easy to get into a group of friends...It

just seems like if I walk up to a group of brown people here, they're like "Hey, what's up"? (Srikanth)

It (being Brown) gives you a sense of who you belong to...that you're wanted. I find that everyone in this world wants to feel wanted. You want to feel wanted from your husband, you want to feel wanted from your parents, you want to feel wanted from you friends. As a group, we want to feel wanted. (Jamal)

"Doing Canadian"

As described in previous sections, despite often using the term "Canadian" as a synonym for "white", on some level, second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth appear to identify strongly with being Canadian. Participants described using their Canadian-ness or "doing Canadian" in situations that might benefit from their foregrounding the more mainstream aspects of their identities.

For example, the youth in this study discussed highlighting the more Canadian aspects of their identities in situations where they want to gain legitimacy. According to participants, being seen as "emotionally neutral" or "culture-less" is beneficial when they want to be taken seriously, or be seen as professional and socially skilled.

I think that (South Asians) don't have the social skills to adapt to a Canadian society where social skills are highly valued...In their society, in their families, they find academic skills highly valued, (whereas) Canadians find social skills very valued. It's very important to be able to speak to people, and to speak confidently (here in Canada)...(South Asians) don't have the (ambition) that Canadian people do. They don't the ability to change, the (adaptability), which I find very important...(These are things) I have worked on. (Dilip)

...When I'm at conference with all pishy-poshy people, then I'm like back straight, I'm very articulate, I watch what I'm saying...And that's like when I bring (my South-Asian-ness) down....You want to make yourself sound as intellectual as possible. (Shafreen)

Participants also reported having minimized their South Asian-ness and "playing up" their Canadian-ness in order to maintain or gain a sense of belonging in mainstream social groups. Youth stated that these efforts to "do Canadian" were most pervasive

during their high school years, when being different in *any* way had potentially devastating social consequences. Although differences in race between themselves and the mainstream were inescapable, participants describe taking great pains to minimize any characteristic (e.g., wearing religious signs or symbols) or behaviour (e.g., bringing Indian food to school for lunch) that might call attention to their diverse ethno-racial roots.

I remember that most of the time, my father would wear a turban, so that was very hard for me. But he was really sensitive to my needs too. He did things like, if I had to be dropped off or picked up, he'd never get out of the car. He was nice like that. And it's not that I wasn't proud, but when you're young, you just...It's hard. Now, I don't care. If anyone says anything to my dad, I'd go fight them. I walk proud now. (Rekha)

I can't think of any specific times, but I know that I've (minimized my South Asian-ness) before. I know that I've tried to not make a big deal out of it...I remember feeling that maybe I shouldn't be too...whether it's in terms of Indian-ness or being Muslim or whatever, I kind of downplay it...But as I've gotten older, I've kind of avoided that more and more (situations where I have to) downplay it. I'm much more proud of it than I was before. Like these things that I'm wearing...I wear different things that signify my religion and stuff, and I wouldn't wear them before because I didn't really want people to comment on them, like "What's that? Why are you wearing that"? But now it's more like I want people to ask, and I want to explain to them, I want them to understand why I do certain things. I don't think of it anymore as a thing to hide or show...it's just something that I am and I deal with it. (Amir)

Youth talked about how the ability to "do Canadian" has been particularly beneficial abroad. In India, for example, foregrounding one's Canadian-ness helps youth to be seen as influential, and helps them to be taken more seriously. This is especially useful in dealing with another country's official organizations.

In India, I had a little incident...My company had advertised me as a North American girl because we were a study abroad company, so it was good for their image. So one morning, I was going out to the rickshaw stand (to go) to work...I had my laptop with me, and a van pulled up next to me and 4 guys came out with bats and stuff. I started taking my laptop off, because that's what I figured they wanted, and they (started yelling at me in Gujarati)...and I had a hard time

understanding...and I'm thinking "God, what do they want?", so I start screaming, and the rickshaw-wallah came, and luckily (because someone was coming), they got back in their van and left. Immediately, the rickshaw-wallah took me to the police station, and I was describing the guy and they're like "Oh, well, yeah, we'll try and find them", and I said "Well, will you be contacting Canadian officials, or should I"? And the second I said "Canadian", that was it. They started moving and doing their thing. Twenty-four hours later, everyone was in jail. It was just ridiculous. (Rani)

These findings suggest that these adolescents and young adults actively negotiate different aspects of their environments, and make deliberate, strategic choices about how to express their identities in ways that achieve certain objectives. As described in previous sections, youth see themselves as having both South Asian and Canadian national identities. Given their perceived membership in both cultures, youth are able to move easily between "doing South Asian" and "doing Canadian", depending on the demands of the situation. Youth, then, are "experts" at actively engaging in a process of negotiation to enact an identity that is both appropriate and successful in achieving particular goals in specific situations. The more versatile the individual is capable of being, the greater her/his success in achieving her/his goals.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Much of the current research on ethno-racially diverse youth focuses on family and value conflict (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000), and the consequences of racism and prejudice (e.g., Perry, 2001). This body of work provides little insight into youths' resiliency and strength in dealing with the potentially oppressive conditions that might arise from living in ethno-racially and culturally heterogeneous environments. The present study, however, represents a shift away from seeing youth from non-dominant ethnic/racial backgrounds as possibly "at-risk", and instead focuses on the power and agency they exhibit across situations. Specifically, this process-focused study of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth illustrates how identities in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults are multidimensional, flexible, and dynamic. Further, youth use their identities strategically and deliberately to achieve particular goals in specific situations, and to challenge potentially oppressive conditions that they encounter within this multicultural context.

In this chapter, I will accomplish three tasks. First, I will summarize the main findings of this study related to the nature of identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth. Here, I will refer to other research in this area as I highlight several of the significant dimensions of youths' identities; explain how these elements are related in complex and meaningful ways; and describe the flexibility of these identities across situations and over time.

Second, I will examine the setting in which these identities exist by revisiting the notion of "multicultural Canada". I will tap into current debates on this issue to show that despite an articulated commitment to the goals of multiculturalism, the extent to which

these objectives are incorporated into the everyday lives of mainstream Canadians is questionable. I will then discuss the consequences of this disconnect between the ideology of multiculturalism and its realities for second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth.

Finally, I will describe how youth express and use their identities to respond to these circumstances. Specifically, I will discuss how they “do Canadian” and “do South Asian” as a way of managing the tensions that can arise when living in this multicultural context. I will show that this ability to move between identities with ease reflects youths’ use of “identity capital” (Côté & Levine, 2002), which helps them to 1) reach objectives that they determine to be personally beneficial and advantageous, and 2) resist reproducing potentially oppressive relationships that exist in the broader society.

The Nature of Identity: Multidimensional and Flexible

Research on identity in ethno-racially diverse youth has traditionally focused on describing one’s *ethnic* identity (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000; Cameron & Lalonde, 1994; Lee, 1999; Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992; Roberts et al, 1999; Romero & Roberts, 1998) or *bicultural* identity (Kanno, 2000). These constructs have been studied as independent variables, and are typically conceived of in terms of risk or resilience (James et al., 2000; Schier et al., 1997; Laursen & Williams, 2002; Waters, 1994). In attempting to make links between the ethno-racial portion of youths’ identities and behavioural and/or mental health problems, this body of work has drawn attention to ethnicity/race, and neglected other factors like class (e.g., Waters, 1994) or gender (e.g., Bhogle, 1999; DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002;

Goodenow & Espin, 1999; Handa, 2003; Saraswathi, 1999), that are also likely implicated in the emergence and persistence of such conditions.

In addition, literature in this field often depicts identity in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults as though it is a stable construct that, once established, remains fixed over one's lifetime and across situations (e.g., Montemayer, 2000; Phinney, 1989; 1990). Despite growing acknowledgement that identity shifts with time and experience (e.g., Cameron & Lalonde, 1994; Razack, 2003; Yon, 2000), many researchers continue to study this as an stable outcome, rather than a fluid process. The findings from such studies, then, provide only a snapshot of youths' ethnic/bicultural identities at one point in time, and within limited circumstances.

By drawing on the experiences of second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, the present research suggests a more complex and dynamic view of identity in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults. In particular, youth describe the various dimensions of their identities as emerging through social interactions within particular contexts. This is consistent with a symbolic interactionist perspective that highlights the significance of others in shaping the way we see ourselves (e.g., Hewitt, 1991; Ritzer, 1992; Strauss, 1956). In addition, these identities are constructed in ways that reflect, reproduce and resist society's systems of oppressions, ideas related to the anti-oppressive social work framework (Dominelli, 2000).

Race, class, and gender were used as entry points in attempting to understand the different elements of youths' identities. While participants did discuss their identities in terms of race and gender, religion and nationality were also critical to the way they see themselves. The category "class" appeared to be only marginal in its importance. An

elaboration of each of these dimensions, a discussion of their relationship to one another, and an illustration of their flexibility over time and across situations follows below.

The Dimensions of Youths' Identities

Race

Being “brown”²⁶ is often one of the first things second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth discuss when talking about their identities. This emphasis on “brownness” as a critical element of identity is consistent with research by Tatum (1997), who focuses on the process of racial identity development in Black youth. According to this author, racialized youth think about themselves in terms of race simply because others around them see them that way²⁷. This process becomes more intense during the adolescent and young adult years when youth are particularly aware of aspects of their identities that are either consistent with, or discrepant from the mainstream.

In her analysis, Tatum (1997) views the social interactions between individuals as key in producing particular views and meanings related to race. This reflects a constructionist approach to understanding racial categorizations, which proposes that the meaning of race is produced through social and political processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Pincus, 2006). This perspective is contrasted by an essentialist view of race, which suggests that despite being rooted in social, historical, and political circumstances, racialization operates *as though* these categorizations are rooted in biological facts. Given that race is critically implicated in identity and social organization, then, such classifications can not be transcended (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1993).

²⁶ For youth in this study, the term “brown” encompasses, in addition to race, qualities related to youths’ South Asian ethnicity and culture.

In the present research, participants' discussions of race and the process of racialization appears to reflect both essentialist and constructionist notions. Consistent with an essentialist view, being brown is an organic detail of youths' physical make-up that is critical to the way they see themselves. Their brown-ness is a taken-for-granted fact of their being that, despite its obviousness, is not particularly salient in their everyday lives.

Race becomes significant, however, when youth interact with others who orient to their brown-ness. Here, the meaning of race is constructed by social beings relating to one another in a particular cultural context. Recall, for example, the following statement made by Meera:

(Being brown) is something I just don't remember. I feel like I'm kind of South Asian in name more than anything. Maybe living with that has almost affected me more than actually being a minority...is being *seen* as a minority...It is strange to be perceived as one thing when you don't even really...I mean, maybe it's 5th on my list of things, you know? It just constantly surprises me that it's the first thing people see.

For these youth, then, although rooted in tangible, physical characteristics, racial categories are not *real*, but rather are based on some socio-cultural need to attach meaning to arbitrary biological differences that exist between people (Pincus, 2006). Despite not being "real" in a social or cultural sense, however, these categorizations are real in their consequences; as described both above and in the previous chapter, the way others respond to second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth is often informed by the assumptions associated with these racial classifications.

Discussions of race are clearly located in a broader social context that positions "brown" in relation to "white". The notion of whiteness has been constructed both

²⁷ This view is shared with many social identity theorists who emphasize the importance of others in

historically (Bonnet, 2000) and in the present (e.g., de Carvalho, Woods, & Andrade, 2004) as an indicator of superior social status. Whiteness is conceptualized as invisible, or the absence of ethnicity (James, 2003; Perry, 2001), and its essence “lies in its power to establish and maintain a silent discourse that so equates normality with (w)hite culture that this culture becomes taken for granted as the norm” (Yee & Dumbrill, 2003, p. 103). In other words, as with other norms, whiteness is the commonsense, taken-for-granted reference point against which “others” are judged.

With regard to the youth in the present study, it is tempting to position “brown” along a continuum that places whiteness at one end and its’ opposite, blackness at the other. Within this framework, blackness is considered to be the space occupied by the undesirable “other”, while whiteness is both preferred and coveted (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978). Indeed, “throughout western colonial history, the white body has been represented by the dominant culture as the most virtuous and aesthetically most appealing, while the dark body has been represented as the least virtuous and aesthetically least appealing” (Mire, 2001, p. 13). Given the social and cultural benefits that accompany whiteness, those who are in the space *between* “black” and “white”, then, struggle (whether consciously or not) to distance themselves from this black “other” and strive to move towards the white ideal. These attempts might focus on emphasizing differences in pigmentation (i.e., articulating “brown” as lighter than “black” and therefore closer to “white”) or differences in behaviours (e.g., adopting certain patterns of speech, behavioural mannerisms, ways of dressing, etc.), but in both cases, function to position the individual closer to “white” and further away from “black”.

shaping our self-perceptions (e.g., Germain, 1998; Rummens, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981).

In the present research, however, youths' discussions of "brown" reflect a less linear and more complex construction of race. In particular, youth discuss being brown without reference to *either* black or white. Instead, youth position brown as a place of power and belonging. As described in the previous chapter, within the brown community, youth receive access to material and economic benefits that are reserved only for others who are brown. According to Mahesh, for example, "When you're brown, you're down²⁸", and therefore automatically receive resources (e.g., term papers, exams while in university) and privileges (e.g., immediate entrance to clubs where other brown youth work as bouncers) that are shared within the brown community. Perhaps even more important, however, are the feelings of belonging that accompany being brown. Recall the statement made by Jamal:

It (being Brown) gives you a sense of who you belong to...that you're wanted. I find that everyone in this world wants to feel wanted.

For participants in the present study, then, claiming their brown identity suggests an attempt to resist positioning themselves somewhere along the "black/white" continuum and instead illustrates how they actively claim an alternative space; a shared "brown" place that both challenges exclusion and contributes to a sense of belonging. The salience of race in youth's lives, and the ways in which they use their "brownness" to achieve certain goals is discussed using the lens of Canadian Critical Race Theory (Aylward, 1999) later in this section (see pages 129-131).

²⁸ Here, Mahesh uses the term "down" in a positive way, to indicate the sense of automatic belonging and inclusion often experienced within the brown community.

Gender

Gender is critical in shaping the way female participants see themselves²⁹. This finding is consistent with other research on second-generation, South Asian-Canadian (e.g., Handa, 2003; Khan, 2000) and South Asian-American women (e.g., Gupta, 1999). These studies typically highlight the challenges faced by these young women as they attempt to negotiate the differences between modern (read “white”) and traditional (read “South Asian”) gender roles within both public and private spheres.

In the present study, however, while female participants *do* distinguish between what it means to be a “good South Asian girl” and a “Canadian woman”, managing these contradictions is not necessarily seen as a process fraught with distress and tension. Instead, within the present generation, the challenges posed by this “collision of cultures” are reframed as opportunities to blend positive elements from each group. Recall, for example, this quote from the interview with Deepa:

I think that (South Asian) women are definitely viewed differently now than when my mom was my age, let’s say. There are a lot more opportunities; they don’t have to fight as hard to be taken seriously. They are pretty much equivalent to men... We think a lot differently than I’d say my mom’s generation... We’re more independent in thought, I think. We’re trying to push boundaries; we’re not as accepting of what we’re told... We have our own opinion... (and don’t) just accept what is told to us. I’d say we have very high goals and expectations for ourselves and we have a different concept of what’s right and wrong I’d say. (For example), in relationships... I’d say (in) my mom’s generation, when she was my age, it would be looked down upon if a woman were to be dating or just basically spending time alone with people of the opposite gender. And I think these days, South Asian women are more likely to do things like that... Dating has always been a norm among North Americans, but it is relatively new to South Asians being accepting of people dating. It’s a phenomenon that’s been happening over I’d say the past ten, fifteen years.

²⁹ Although identified as an important dimension of their identities, the young men in this study did not discuss gender in to the same degree, or in the same way, as their female counterparts.

Within the present social and cultural context, then, second-generation, South Asian-Canadian young women are re-conceptualizing their gender roles in a way that allows them to combine the best qualities of the “good South Asian girl” (e.g., caring, maternal, family-oriented), with mainstream views of what makes a “Canadian woman” (e.g., strength, education, power). Instead of experiencing the confusion and stress of a “culture clash”, these young women appear to be benefiting from an expanded array of “appropriate” gender choices when considering what qualities to integrate into their identities.

Religion

Many of the youth in this study pointed to religion as being a fundamental component of their identities. As described above, the majority of current research on ethno-racially diverse youth is conducted with the goal of identifying the risk and/or protective potential of one’s ethnic/racial roots. Religious affiliation and religiosity are often topics of interest in such studies, since a high level of faith and spirituality is assumed to be an indicator of a strong ethnic identity. For example, increased religiosity has been associated with enhanced mental health (e.g., Constantine et al., 2002), decreased drug use (e.g., Amey, Albrecht, & Miller, 1996; Wallace & Bachman, 1991) and decreased alcohol abuse (e.g., Brown, Zimmerman, & Phillips, 2001) in youth from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds³⁰.

For those who took part in the present study, however, the connection between religion and behaviour/mental health outcomes is less straightforward. Participants who identify themselves as moderately or highly religious feel that their faith/spirituality is a

way of life that influences their values and behaviours, provides them with strength, affects who they socialize with, and determines future mate selection. Further, many of these youth talk about their religiosity as having become stronger with age and through exposure to various challenging life circumstances. In the current study, then, religious affiliation and religiosity are not static, independent variables that can be viewed as risk or protective factors. Instead, religious affiliation and religiosity constitute a dimension of identity that, like identity itself, is a dynamic, complex process, not a simple, measurable outcome.

Nationality

National identifications are also critical to youths' identities. Specifically, participants see themselves as Canadian *and* South Asian. This "national duality" is similar to findings from other research in which ethno-racially diverse youth assume a "compound" or "hyphenated" identity that acknowledges both their country of birth and citizenship, as well as their ethno-racial and cultural roots (e.g., James, 1999; Mahtani, 2004; Rodrigues et al., 1999; Stepick & Stepick, 2002). These findings are reflective of a broader cultural trend in which "a growing number of people define themselves in terms of multiple national attachments, and feel at ease with subjectivities that encompass plural and fluid cultural identities" (Calgar, 1997, p. 169).

The experience of youth in the present research is consistent with the constructionist notion of national identity that emphasizes its complexity, subjectivity, and fluidity (Duara, 1996). Whereas essentialists argue that nationality is a primordial identification that is tied to one's ethnicity/race (and which is therefore fixed and

³⁰ While this body of work is expanding to include consideration of a variety of ethno-racial groups (e.g., Constantine et al., 2002), most research in this area has focused on the experiences of black youth growing

unalterable) (e.g., Armstrong, 1982), a constructionist interpretation posits that nationality is not a given, but rather is an organizing principle that emerges through social, political, and historical processes (e.g., Brass, 1991; Hroch, 1996).

Constructionists also argue that national identities are not unified subject positions, but are instead relational (Duara, 1996). This means that the way one views her/himself nationally depends on her/his surroundings, and to what s/he compares her/himself. For example, for youth in the present study, national identifications are linked to geographic location. While they assume both Canadian and South Asian nationalities, youth feel more Canadian when abroad, and more South Asian while here in Canada. Recall, for example, this excerpt from the interview with Amir:

When I go somewhere else from here (in Canada), I don't think about going to India or going wherever...I always think I want to go back to Canada, because this is my home. But at the same time, I'm not Canadian when I'm here. When I'm here, when you say "Canadian", usually you're talking about Canadian people, like white people, and here I'm (South Asian). If people ask me here, "What are you"?, I'll be like "I'm (South Asian)". But if I go to the States, I'll say I'm Canadian. It's really strange...When I'm here, it's weird...I would never say I'm *just* Canadian. I'd say I'm Indian-Canadian, or South Asian-Canadian...The hyphen is always there. When I'm somewhere else I'm just Canadian.

Identification with a particular nationality appears to be determined by the extent to which youth feel that they "stick out", or differ from the majority. Here in Canada, for example, participants are *visibly* different from mainstream Canadians, whom they view as "the norm". In these instances, then, their brown-ness sets them apart from white Canadians, and their South Asian nationality is emphasized. While in other parts of the world, however, youth seem to orient to *cultural* differences between themselves and other majorities. In India, for example, despite commonalities in ethnicity/race,

participants discuss how their values and behaviours set them apart from mainstream South Asians. This results in an increased sense of Canadian-ness.

The complex nature of youths' national identifications is further highlighted by the fact that youth use the term "Canadian" in different ways throughout their interviews (see pages 63-65). Recall that youth identify strongly as Canadian, and describe themselves as subscribing to the shared set of values and beliefs that characterize this nation. Further, an important part of what makes them Canadian is the fact that they can simultaneously "be Canadian", while "being South Asian".

What is curious, however, is that despite their strong identification with "Canadian", youth *also* use this term to describe people who are white. Specifically, youth talk about not being able to relate to "Canadians", or juxtapose "Canadian" with "South Asian" when discussing certain values or characteristics that differ between these groups. In these instances, then, youth use the term "Canadian" in a way that suggests that they are not Canadian at all.

According to Himani Bannerji (2000), the complex, contradictory nature of youths' national identifications is typical of the experience of most racialized individuals in Canada. Despite a multicultural discourse that suggests that we live in a harmonious society where people from all ethno-racial groups live equally as "Canadians", truly being Canadian means having white skin and a European, North American background. Youths' tenuous connection to a Canadian identity, then, reflects the fact that the colour of their skin prevents them from being seen by others as *real* (read "white") Canadians. For these participants, Canada is a mental space, an

imagined community³¹ ... a construction, a set of representations embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operations... (These communities were constructed with certain ideas regarding skin colour, history, language, and other cultural signifiers, all of which may be subsumed under the ideological category 'white'" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 64).

For second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, then, belonging and alienation exist together at once. They are told by the dominant discourse that they are Canadian (either by birth or by naturalization), but are never seen as *real* Canadians given the way the colour of their skin, the language they speak, and their religion depart from the white, English/French, Judeo-Christian norm. Citizenship, then, does not guarantee a sense of belonging or true membership (Bannerji, 2000; Hage, 1998; Ng 1997).

In terms of nationality, then, the hyphenated term "South Asian-Canadian" suggests how youth attempt to resolve the contradiction between feeling Canadian at times, and South Asian at other times. However, while this expression implies a sense of connection to both nationalities, the findings from this study suggest that it is in fact the feeling of not fully being included in either context that determines which national identification predominates.

Class

Although "class"³², along with race and gender, was assumed to be a critical element of youths' self-perceptions, participants rarely referred to this category when asked to describe their identities. When probed, youth identified themselves as occupying

³¹ The notion of an "imagined community" is one that views nations as characterized not by physical boundaries, but rather by the sense of its members as occupying a shared psychological space in which communal bonds are experienced (Anderson, 1991).

³² The notion of "class" is fraught with confusion and debate. People differ about whether to use class in the economic sense, in the social sense, in the political sense, etc., and social scientists disagree about how many classes exist, what they should be called, etc. (Pincus, 2006). In this study, "class" is used to refer to income or financial wealth.

a middle class position in society, attributing their status to their parents' hard work and sacrifice. Indeed, using family income and education as indicators of "middle class" status (Pincus, 2006), all of the participants in this study can be considered as members of this socio-economic grouping.

Unlike many of the identity dimensions described above, youths' status as "middle class" is a characteristic shared with most "mainstream" Canadians. Whereas participants' brown-ness, their varied religious backgrounds, in some cases their gender, and their "hyphenated" nationalities usually distinguish them from the white, male, Judeo-Christian norm, they are "normal" or "common" in terms of socio-economic status. Being a member of the middle class provides them with the same access to social, financial, and economic opportunities as their mainstream Canadian peers, and so given this commonality of experience, it is not surprising that this dimension of identity is not salient to participants. Consider, for example, the following statement made by Amir:

I'm middle class...(That means), I guess, that we're not wealthy, but we're not struggling either. The only time I (think about it) is when you see someone on the street asking for money or something. That makes you feel like they're underprivileged or whatever, but most of the time, it's not (something that is important to me).

Like racial, religious, gender, and national distinctions, class categorizations become meaningful only when the position occupied differs from the "norm" (Pincus, 2006). Sharing membership in the middle class majority, then, means that participants are not excluded from certain mainstream endeavours (e.g., access to education, participation in cultural life), and are therefore protected from experiencing exclusion on the basis of their socio-economic status. It is for this reason that identification as "middle class" is a simple, taken-for-granted fact in these youths' lives. Although participants suggest, then,

that class is not an identity dimension that is necessarily critical to their sense of self, the very fact of its absence from consideration indicates its importance.

The Relationship Between Dimensions: The Notion of Interlocking Oppressions

Race, gender, religion, nationality, and even class are dimensions of identity that are obviously integral to the way second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth see themselves. These dimensions are linked to one another in important ways. Recall, for example, this excerpt from the interview with Farah, who describes how she often feels excluded and marginalized because together, her religion, gender, and ethno-racial heritage come together and place her in a disadvantaged position relative to the majority:

I think that (I'm)...disadvantaged first of all by being a Muslim...because of all the media and all the stuff. And secondly by being a Pakistani and thirdly by...being a woman. I think those three things have hit me in the past couple of years...(I see it) in my program. They are all white people, so me being the only (woman), being the only Muslim, the only Pakistani, the only brown person in the class. I find that to be quite hard, I get a lot of stares...(there's) a lot of ignorance that I've noticed....

Rummens (2003) discusses how the “intersection” between various identity dimensions, like the one described by Farah, has particular consequences for those from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds. She suggests that it is important to consider the impact of these connections, since this may reveal

“multiple jeopardies...where multiple minority identifications intersect to effect an even less equitable social standing and outcome for the individual or population category in question than might be expected from any one such identification on its own” (Rummens, 2003, p. 20).

This perspective proposes that when added together, identity dimensions that differ considerably from mainstream norms (e.g., white, male, Judeo-Christian, etc.) work cumulatively to exert more “risk” than any one of these “jeopardies” on its own.

According to this view, then, being brown *and* a woman is worse than if one were a member of a minority racial category alone.

The findings from the present research, however, suggest the importance of context and interactions with others in determining the way that these oppressions are expressed and managed. For example, as members of the middle class, these youth experience certain advantages, like access to education, financial freedom, etc. In specific situations, it is possible that these factors might help to “erase” or offset the potentially negative impact of their brown-ness. How can we account, then, for the fact that particular identity dimensions (e.g., being a member of the middle class, maleness) may buffer or diminish the negative effects of the qualities (e.g., race, religion) that might place youth in positions of relative disadvantage?

The notion of “interlocking oppressions” is helpful in understanding this complex relationship between identity dimensions. This concept, first introduced by Patricia Hill Collins (1990), is rooted in the idea that differences between members of society are constructed by those in positions of power (read “white men”) to help them maintain control over those with less access to power (i.e., women, people of colour, people with disabilities, etc.). In particular, Collins writes “as the ‘Others’ of society, who can never really belong, strangers threaten the moral and social order...(but at the same time) they are essential for its survival, because those...who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries” (Collins, 1990, p. 68).

Given that we all occupy a variety of subject positions (i.e., based on race, class, gender, ability, etc.), there exist a number of potential sites for the construction and identification of these “differences” (Dei, 2004). Fellows & Razack (1998) argue that

once these differences are identified and the power structure is activated, a system of interlocking oppressions is created. Within this system, oppressive structures

“...come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism and so on. Because the systems rely on one another in these complex ways, it is ultimately futile to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting others”.
(Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 335-6)

According to this notion of interlocking oppressions, race, class, gender, religion, and so on, are related in complex ways such that a person in a position of racial privilege might also be in a position of disadvantage in terms of her class or gender. For second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, then, disadvantage based on race might be mitigated, for example, by their classification within the middle class, by gender (in the case of males), or by religion (for those who are Christian). It is this complicated relationship between identity dimensions that allows a person to be an oppressor in one situation, and a victim of oppression in another.

The concept of “interlocking oppressions” can help us to gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of living with a diverse set of identities, some of which can place a person in a position of advantage, and others that have the opposite effect. This makes it difficult to isolate any of these identity dimensions, and classify them in terms of either risk or protection.

As stated above, the notion of context and the role of others in shaping the expression of various identity dimensions for the youth who took part in this study. Specifically, the manner in which these identity dimensions operate together necessarily depends on the particular situation in which they exist, and with whom the individual is interacting. For example, while being a young, South Asian woman might place her at a

disadvantage when relating with mainstream peers, the same age/ethno-racial background/gender arrangement might work in her favour when dealing with potential employers. Clearly, then, youths' identities are not stable and fixed, but rather reflect flexibility and change. This aspect of identity is discussed in more detail below.

The Flexibility of Youths' Identities

Findings from the present research show that although maintaining some necessary stability across situations and over time (Hewitt, 1991), participants' identities are flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances. Identity is created and re-created continually, shifting in response to the qualities of different situations, as well as events that happen over the course of a lifetime. Participants discuss how these "selves" are shaped in response to changing personal interests, evolving relationships with family and members of the South Asian community, and factors in the broader society. Each of these factors can change at any time, and are differentially influential depending on an individual's particular circumstances. In addition, a change in one factor can trigger changes in any of the other factors.

This is consistent with other research on identity (both generally as well as in ethno-racially diverse youth) that points to a particular element of the individual's world as the primary force in shaping youths' identities. For example, research guided by the developmental theory highlights the role of the individual and her/his personal interests (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980, 1992); studies based on social identity theory place emphasis on the importance of social relationships with others (e.g., Desai & Subramanian, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); and those rooted in the ecological systems framework stress contextual factors at various levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Mahoney, 1975). When taken together, these approaches are helpful in

describing how a range of factors (i.e., personal interests, family circumstances, relationship to the South Asian community, and the nature of the surrounding context) intersect to contribute to the way youths' identities are created and re-created in different circumstances and at various times. The dynamic interplay between these elements produces identities that, despite maintaining a basic coherence and integration, are adaptive and continually evolving across situations and throughout one's life span.

As the above discussion shows, youths' identities are comprised of multiple dimensions (i.e., race, gender, religion, nationality, and class), which emerge differentially through interactions with others in specific contexts (Hewitt, 1991; Ritzer, 1992; Strauss, 1956). These dimensions are expressed in ways that either 1) reflect or reproduce oppressive relationships in society (e.g., race, class), or 2) work to resist them (e.g., gender) (Dominelli, 2000). Finally, these identities are flexible, providing youth with the tools necessary to adapt to changing circumstances, both in particular situations, as well as over their lifetimes.

In the next section, I will describe the broader societal context in which these identities operate. Specifically, I will return to the idea of "multicultural Canada", and will review the current debate regarding the discrepancies between the ideology and objectives of multiculturalism, and the way these are realized in Canadians' day-to-day lives. The consequences of these inconsistencies for second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth specifically, and ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults more broadly will also be discussed.

The Context Revisited:

The Reality of Canadian Multiculturalism

In general, there is a widespread acceptance of multiculturalism in Canada, along with the attitude that immigration has more positive outcomes than negative ones (Hiebert, 2003). The extent to which the goals of multiculturalism are realized in the day-to-day lives of Canadians, however, have been widely debated. At the root of most of these critiques is the argument that the ideology of multiculturalism has a less transparent, unarticulated objective: to allow those in positions of power to reap the economic rewards of immigration, while at the same time “containing” and managing cultural diversity (Bedard, 2000; Bhabha, 1994).

Critics suggest, for example, that multiculturalism maintains a shallow focus on ethnicity and race by promoting “celebrations of diversity” that work to distract people from analyzing the power differences that are rooted in racial inequality (Dei, 1994; James, 1999). This practice has been referred to as the “saris, samosas, and steel band syndrome” (Dei, 1996; Khan, 2000), and involves displaying superficial aspects of a culture (e.g., ethnic trinkets, foods, and dance) for mainstream consumption. Rather than promoting a deep, meaningful understanding of the customs and traditions of different ethno-cultural groups, or to make fundamental changes that might redistribute goods and privileges in society (Dei, 1996), these “festivals” end up trivializing people’s cultural practices, and undermining the very ideology Canadians purport to protect and promote (Bissoondath, 1994).

This superficial treatment of diversity, or “shallow multiculturalism” (Hiebert, 2003), results in a very fixed, static conception of those who differ from the mainstream

(Bhabha, 1994; Calgar, 1997), ideas that are typically informed by Orientalist notions of “the Other” (Bissoondath, 1994; Khan, 2000). In other words, based on this limited look at cultural practices, *all* individuals from a particular ethno-racial background are assumed to share certain stereotypical qualities that are different from (and often less desirable than) characteristics of mainstream Canadians.

What is perhaps most problematic, however, is that this “celebratory” view of diversity has become a “commonsense”, unquestioned way of describing the Canadian approach to ethno-racial diversity (Bedard, 2000). If one accepts the classic multicultural rhetoric that we live in a society that values equality based on race, religion, nationality, etc., it is difficult to identify or take seriously claims that violate this “norm”. Racism, the existence of hate crimes, biased hiring practices, etc. are things that simply *cannot* exist in this environment. By making something “commonsense” in this way, any discourse that challenges this taken-for-granted way of doing things is seen as an exception to the rule, or the fault of the injured party (Bedard, 2000; Dei et al., 2004).

For youth in this study, despite expressing a “hybrid” national identity that encompasses both South Asian and Canadian elements, they clearly express a tenuous connection to the Canadian identity. The results described in the previous chapter confirm the critiques described above. Specifically, participants discuss how for many in the mainstream, their ethno-racial background is “curious” and “fascinating” in a superficial sense. They cite several examples in which they have been called upon to be “educators” or “purveyors” of the South Asian culture for mainstream audiences. In addition, youth identify many instances in which stereotypical assumptions, based on their South Asian background, are made by those individuals.

These practices remain largely uninterrogated, because the tenets of multiculturalism support them. Mainstream Canadians are *supposed* to show interest in other people's cultures, no matter how superficial or "otherizing" this might feel to those with ethno-racially diverse roots. When youth attempt to call attention to how this makes them uncomfortable, the "commonsense" version of multiculturalism is activated, and their concerns are dismissed.

This situation is particularly complex for second-generation, South Asian-Canadians. Youth describe sometimes feeling like they are "too brown" for white people, and "too white" for some in the South Asian community. Consider, for example, this statement by Jayanthi:

When I was going through high school, all my white friends, (they all knew me as) a fun-loving, didn't-care-what-I-did kind of person. Then with my Indian friends, I was...this prim and proper Indian girl. I was two different people—you could tell. When I was with my white friends, I would try to talk like them, (and just generally fit in). When I was with my Indian friends, I'd always talk in Katchi, or have that little bit of an accent to make sure that I fit in there—(I had to make sure) that I wasn't *too* white for them.

Attempts to fit in with either group, then, can be a difficult, tension-producing process that leaves youth feeling as though they are caught between two worlds, each with its own set of values, norms, behaviours, etc. (e.g., Hiebert, 2003; Tonks & Paranjpe, 1999a). Although, as the above interview excerpt shows, youth in the present research certainly describe experiencing tension and strain as they attempt to deal with these stressful circumstances, their responses are *also* characterized by power and strength. Jayanthi, for example, gains belonging and acceptance in both peer groups by deliberately selecting a particular "self" to foreground in different interactions. By "doing Canadian" in certain situations, and "doing South Asian" in others, she is seen as "one of

us” by members of each group, and is received favourably. These youth, then, make deliberate choices foreground particular identity dimensions to 1) achieve outcomes that work most in their favour (e.g., material benefits, psychological advantage etc.), and 2) attempt to resolve the contradictions posed by multiculturalism in Canada today. These processes are discussed in greater detail below.

“Doing South Asian” or “Doing Canadian”:

Responding to the Reality of Canadian Multiculturalism

A critical aspect of identity that is receiving increasing attention in the current literature is the role played by youth in the expression of their identities. Although early research on youth and identity appears to have only a limited focus on this theme (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), recent studies with ethno-racially diverse youth have suggested that they are intentional and deliberate in the expression of identities that are situationally appropriate and beneficial (e.g., Ajrouch, 2000; Simmons et al., 2000; Stepick & Stepick, 2002; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999). An in-depth understanding of where, why, and how youths engage in this process, however, is absent.

In the present study, attempts were made to understand how second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth express and use their identities in interactions with others in their social environments. As described above, findings suggest that adolescents and young adults do, in fact, actively negotiate different aspects of their environments, and make deliberate, strategic choices about how to express their identities in ways that achieve certain objectives. These goals include those which are material/economic (e.g., access to resources, securing employment) or emotional/psychological (e.g., gaining legitimacy, feeling a sense of belonging).

The ability to move between different sites of identity is particularly important for ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults who, although living in a “multicultural” society, often face pressures, barriers, and discrimination related to their ethnic/racial makeup (Yon, 2000). Despite their sometimes tenuous connections to their Canadian and South Asian identities, the youth in the present study are especially skilled at shifting between these two “selves”. In particular, second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth manage these challenges by invoking this strategy of “doing Canadian” or “doing South Asian” by 1) assessing each situation, 2) deciding which identity will help them to achieve the desired outcome, and 3) executing the identity that is most useful in reaching this goal.

Below, I provide examples of participants’ experiences of “doing Canadian” and “doing South Asian” to reach particular goals at individual, group, and system levels. I then discuss how viewing this process through the lens of Critical Race Theory helps us to understand how this is a response to youths’ experiences of racism in multicultural Canada. I conclude this section by discussing the concept of “identity capital” (Côté & Levine, 2002), and showing that this is a useful way of understanding how second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth use their identities strategically in interactions with others to achieve specific objectives and/or challenge the oppressive dynamics that exist within our multicultural context.

Interactions with Individuals

Youth cite numerous examples of “doing Canadian” and “doing South Asian” in their daily, one-on-one exchanges with mainstream Canadians, South Asians, and South Asian-Canadians. In each situation, youth act in ways that are most likely to facilitate reaching a particular goal (e.g., getting the best deal from a South Asian storeowner,

managing an instance of discrimination). The fluid and multiple nature of identity (Gergen, 1994), combined with having access to several (sometimes competing) identity options (Rummens, 2003; Yon, 2000) supports this movement between these two dimensions.

Recall, for example, the following excerpt from the interview with Jayanthi:

I (use my South Asian connections) all the time... You have someone who wants something, and you know with your Indian-ness, you can get that thing. (An example) is when (our group) was having an event, like a Cards Night or a Movie Night or something... We didn't have a lot of money to do it, so we were asking for sponsors. We went to the WalMart, to Zellers... and nobody would help us out. But as soon as we went to the Indian community and we were like "Auntie, Uncle, can you help us with this and that", they were more than willing to give it to (us). They were just willing to donate it to (us)... (That) was a big thing. That's how I use my Indian-ness to my advantage... through the networks.

Here, Jayanthi capitalizes on her connection to others in the South Asian network, and effortlessly "does South Asian" in order to successfully achieve her material goal of raising funds for her social event. According to symbolic interactionists, "as people, we construct our own and each other's identities through our everyday encounters with each other in social interaction" (Mead, 1934, p. 9-10). Therefore, when youth act in ways that are consistent with either "doing Canadian" or "doing South Asian", and the other actor(s) in the situation regards her/him as authentic in that state, the strategy invoked by youth is considered to have been successful.

At the Level of the Group

Youth also describe "doing Canadian", or "doing South Asian" in order to achieve the goal of gaining or maintaining a sense of belonging within particular group settings. Participants most often "do Canadian" when with their mainstream peers, in order to avoid feeling socially excluded on the basis of their different ethnic/racial background, their non-dominant religion, etc. Alternatively, youth typically "do South

Asian” when with other South Asian-Canadians. For example, consider the following excerpts from the interview with Shafreen:

Normally, I wouldn't have thought about wearing a sari for my birthday, but it was my 21st, and I was like “I'm going to brown it up”...I wore a sari and a bindi, and I had my hair...Just because it's a key birthday, and it's expected. We had some family over...For the first time since I came to university, I went home for my birthday, because it was expected, just because it was such a big birthday. I (also do that) when I go to brown events—When you go to weddings and stuff, again, you brown it up. You get dressed as culturally as possible, you act a bit more reserved...

When I'm at conference with all pishy-poshy people, then I'm like back straight, I'm very articulate, I watch what I'm saying...And that's like when I bring (my South Asian-ness) down...You want to make yourself sound as articulate as possible at these (events).

Here, Shafreen talks about how in certain settings (e.g., with family on an important occasion, at weddings and other “brown” events), she “does South Asian”, while in other situations (e.g., at a professional conference attended by many members of the mainstream), she elects to “do Canadian”. By making these strategic identity choices, she meets the expectations of those around her, and as a result, gains acceptance and feels a sense of belonging among members of each group.

Interacting with Systems

Second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth also “do Canadian” and “do South Asian” when interacting with society's larger systems. Several participants, for example, talked about experiences of discrimination within the school system. In some instances, these youth were able to “do South Asian” (i.e., by being outspoken on issues related to race) in order to manage these situations. Recall the experience of Rekha, who uses her South Asian-ness to gain power with the “white” administration of her school, individuals who were uncomfortable with issues of race:

I'd get away with a lot of things (in high school), just because I think the administration didn't want any trouble. I used to take advantage of it a little bit...Our school rules (were), like anywhere, if you don't go to the school, you can't go there...it's trespassing... and they'll kick you out. (People got kicked out) all the time, but whenever *my* friends would come, nobody would say anything... The principal would (even) personally come to my classroom and be like "Oh, Rekha, your friends are here, and they're just waiting for you in the office". I feel like I got special VIP treatment. (Rekha)

Clearly, "doing South Asian" helps Rekha to achieve her immediate goal of having friends visit her on school property. Perhaps more importantly, however, foregrounding this identity dimension allows her to influence school administration, and subvert the typical "female-student-of-colour versus male-white-principal" power dynamic. In this interaction with the education system, then, the particular identity choice she executes reflects an attempt to resist reproducing a potentially oppressive relationship shaped by broader, societal norms (Dominelli, 1998; 2000).

Understanding These Processes through a Critical Race Lens

It is important to recognize that youths' attempts to "do South Asian" or "do Canadian" described above take place within a racialized context. Given its focus on the realities of race and racism in the lives of those who differ from the "white" norm, Critical Race Theory (CRT)³³, is particularly helpful in explaining 1) how these youth experience race and racism, and 2) how their efforts to deliberately foreground particular identity dimensions can be viewed as attempts to "deconstruct" and "reconstruct" the dominant, racialized discourse that exists within "multicultural" Canada.

Critical Race Theory evolved from the body of literature known as "Critical Legal Studies" that highlights the realities of race and racism in the law. According to CRT, the

³³ Although Critical Race Theory originated in the field of law (more specifically in Critical Legal Studies), its concepts have been applied to other areas in the social sciences, including education, women's studies, and increasingly in social work.

law, a presumably objective and neutral set of practices aimed at achieving justice, is unevenly applied to individuals based on race. The concept of race is socially constructed, and racism is a “normal”, everyday practice that is rooted in the power differentials that exist between those who are white, and those who are not (Aylward, 1999). Race is central in the lives of people of colour, since whiteness is understood (both historically and in the present) as being the optimal, privileged standard in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Racism is manifested in interactions at individual and group levels (Delgado, 1995), as well as within public structures and institutions (Singer, 2005).

Carol Aylward (1999), who focuses specifically on Canadian CRT argues that here in Canada, despite a “multicultural” discourse that suggests that all races and cultures are equal and should be celebrated, racism is an unrelenting reality. In fact, racism takes on both systemic and subtle forms, the effects of which are consistently harmful and subordinating to people of colour. She rejects the idea that law (and by extension, social relations and processes) are “colour-blind”, and along with others (e.g., Hudson, 2006), argues that the first step in eradicating the inequalities that exist in various legal and social systems in society is to recognize and acknowledge the existence of these practices.

Consistent with CRT, the second-generation, South Asian-Canadian young women and men who took part in this research clearly articulate the salience of race and racism in their lives. As described in previous sections, the way these youth talk about what it means to be “brown”, as well as their accounts of specific experiences of covert and overt forms of racism highlight the fact that race is critical to the way they see themselves. Within an environment, however, where the primary discourse is one of

“celebrating diversity”, youth are deprived of the language with which to speak of racism. Indeed if they do describe experiencing a racist encounter, they receive the message that this is simply an aberration (Aylward, 1999). Implicit in this is the understanding that the fault somehow lies with the individual victim of racism, and not with larger, Canadian society.

Of particular interest, then, is that within this context, youth “do South Asian” or “do Canadian” in order to gain both material/economic and psychological/emotional power in different situations. These can be understood as attempts to deconstruct oppressive discourses, and purposefully challenge existing power structures (e.g., see Rekha’s experience with her high school principal described above). It is clear that these youth experience success with these self-presentations, since (as illustrated in previous sections), these attempts at reconstruction typically yield the desired psychological or material benefit.

CRT, then, is a useful lens through which to understand the experiences and actions of these youth, since it helps us to capture the complexities underlying their attempts to reconstruct social relationships in a deliberate, agentic way. Clearly, the youth in this study have gained considerable expertise in strategically foregrounding different aspects of their identities in order to achieve particular goals. Specifically, they are able to “do South Asian” or “do Canadian” depending on the requirements of any situation. It is unfortunate, however, that youth find it necessary to invoke strategies that routinely position their national identities in opposition to one another *in the first place*. Although it is without question that our self-presentations vary depending on the demands of particular situations (Mead, 1934), “doing South Asian” or “doing Canadian” suggests

the positioning and re-positioning of our selves in ways that can become stressful and exhausting. Further, this is an act performed by youth who are racialized or marginalized, but work that is not required by their mainstream, white counterparts. Therefore, although viewed here as a strength, future research might try to gain a deeper understanding of the negative social and psychological consequences of this strategic management of identity for racialized youth.

Moving between Canadian and South Asian Identities:

The Role of Identity Capital

As stated at the outset of this section, current literature in the area of identity in ethno-racially diverse youth offers only a limited understanding of the way that youth express and use their identities. Specifically, I suggested that an in-depth understanding of where, why, and how these processes operate is lacking. The above discussion clearly shows that youth strategically move between different sites of identity at individual, group, and systems levels (i.e., *where*), in order to 1) achieve particular material/economic or emotional/psychological goals, and/or 2) respond to and subvert potentially oppressive relationships shaped by broader social circumstances (i.e., *why*).

The notion of “capital”, originally explored by Bourdieu (1977), can be useful in helping to understand *how* youth express and use their identities. Bourdieu (1977) viewed all social behaviour as taking place within a particular “field of action”, and governed by a specific set of values and practices. While these “fields” exist within and are influenced by the norms and characteristics of larger society, social behaviour is also affected by the individual strategies or “practices” that one brings into any situation. These strategies are necessarily shaped by the resources, or “capital” at a person’s disposal. Different forms of capital exist, each of which promotes advancement in a particular area (e.g., cultural,

social, economic, etc.). The way one enacts her/his identity, then, is determined by 1) the specific circumstances in which the interaction is taking place (i.e., the field of action), 2) the resources and skills s/he brings to the situation (i.e., her/his capital), and 3) the strategies (i.e., practices) that are employed to reach each goal.

The work of Côté & Levine (2002) builds upon Bourdieu's (1977) ideas by focusing specifically on "*identity capital*". For these authors, previous notions of capital are useful in understanding human interactions, but they are limited in their ability to account for the "persisting status differentiations based on class, race, gender and age (and) the discrimination that these differentiations can produce" (Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 142). They suggest that oppressive power dynamics that exist within contemporary social institutions pose considerable challenges to individuals and their identities. Although some individuals are able to effectively and strategically manage these stressors, others are not as well-equipped to do so.

What distinguishes members of each of these groups is their relative level of identity capital. One's identity capital refers to "the varied resources deployable on an individual basis that represent how people most effectively define themselves and have others define them in various contexts" (Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 142). The emphasis here is on both the tangible assets a person has at her/his disposal (e.g., wealth, education) as well as the intangible or psychological resources (i.e., the capacity for self-reflection and evaluation) s/he brings to a situation. The greater a person's identity capital, the more power or advantage s/he has within an interaction, and the greater her/his capability to manoeuvre effectively and efficiently within a range of social contexts.

Identity capital emerges, and is strengthened, through “identity exchanges”, which take place between people within a particular social interaction. One person acts, and the other responds according to some shared sense of what constitutes an acceptable response. If the interaction is successful (i.e., if there is mutual acceptance of the shared meanings emerging from these interactions between individuals, groups, or systems), the actor gains identity capital. These added resources, in turn, strengthen her/his position in future interactions, and increase the likelihood of future successes.

Findings from the present study illustrate how second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth have, over the course of their lives, amassed a substantial amount of identity capital. Whether material/economic or psychological/emotional, these youth have gained significant expertise in 1) evaluating the demands of particular interactions, at individual, group, or systems levels; 2) making decisions about which identity will best support them in achieving their goal(s) within those interactions; and 3) foregrounding particular identity dimensions favourable to reaching these objectives. This is clear in the way youth make decisions to “do Canadian” or “do South Asian” as a way of attaining specific goals, or managing the challenges of living in the multicultural, Canadian context.

When considered along with the idea of “interlocking oppressions”, the notion of “identity capital” is even more useful. Recall that according to the concept of interlocking oppressions, youths’ identities are comprised of various dimensions, each of which is a potential site for the construction of difference and oppression (e.g., race, gender, class, religion, etc.). Depending on the situation, then, a person may either be in a position of power or conversely, powerlessness.

The idea of “identity capital” builds upon this complex, interlocking view of identity dimensions by adding another layer to these processes. In particular, as is evident from the examples provided above, these youth may be viewed as drawing on various resources (both tangible and intangible) in order to manage and offset the challenges posed by these interlocking oppressions. Youth, then, bring to each interaction, (whether at the individual, group, or system level) a constellation of resources that provides them with the power and advantage necessary to counteract the negative effects of oppression. This helps them both to reach their personal goals, and to challenge (and perhaps subvert) existing power structures.

Key to this discussion of capital is the notion of *resources*. In distinguishing between tangible resources (e.g., financial resources, educational credentials, membership in certain groups or clubs, parental social status), and intangible resources (e.g., capacities such as ego strength, an internal locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, social perspective taking, critical thinking, moral reasoning, a sense of purpose in life), Côté & Schwartz (2002) suggest that “tangible resources tend to be manifested in the behaviours and possessions of individuals, whereas...intangible resources tend to constitute personality attributes” (p. 575). The youth in the present study, by virtue of their middle or middle/upper class socio-economic locations, experience substantial access to tangible resources (e.g., financial resources, education), which likely facilitates the accumulation of intangible resources. It is these *intangible* resources that enable youth to “do Canadian” or “do South Asian” in order to achieve their material/economic and psychological emotional goals.

According to structural social workers Colleen Lundy (2004) and Bob Mullaly (2007), the material/economic conditions and the resultant social arrangements we experience affect the way we see ourselves and the problems we encounter. As described above, the presence of tangible resources in a person's life tends to facilitate the accumulation of intangible resources. Without the former, then, securing and using intangible resources can be difficult.

This raises a host of questions about the nature of identity capital in racialized youth who do *not* have the same level of access to tangible and /or intangible resources as the young women and men who took part in this study. In particular, one might ask: Are tangible and intangible resources in fact related in such a way that the development/enhancement of the latter in fact depends on the presence of the former? What are the implications of this for racialized youth *without* such access to resources, and what are the consequences for their identity capital? Does identity capital that might have been accumulated as a result of gender (i.e., for males) work to offset the lack of tangible resources due to socio-economic status? Does identity capital therefore simply not exist among members of particular classes? How do racialized youth who are members of the working class, for example, manage the inconsistencies of living within a multicultural environment?

Although the notion of identity capital is useful for providing us with an overall picture of how the second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth in the present research might use their identities to achieve particular goals, this formulation is less clear in describing the experiences of racialized individuals from different socio-economic groups. The findings from this study, then, provide a useful starting point from

which to look more deeply at the role of class in youths' ability to strategically use their identities across situations to achieve their specific goals.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Identity in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults is a topic that is receiving growing attention in current literature. Given the significant relational, occupational, and ideological changes that are likely to take place during these critical years, researchers have sought to understand the role of youths' race and ethnicity in the complex processes that underlie such transformations.

The current study has attempted to resolve the apparent inconsistency between the way identity in ethno-racially diverse youth is often described by those studying in this area (i.e., as a fluid and dynamic *process*), and how this issue is actually researched (i.e., as a fixed and stable *outcome*). Here, I used a process-focused research approach and a qualitative methodology capable of accessing the fluidity and dynamism of identity in a particular group of ethno-racially diverse youth: second-generation, South Asian-Canadians.

Findings from this research suggest that these young women and men are influenced both by a distinct ethnic/racial history, and a personal history grounded in "Canadian" experiences. These identities are multidimensional, flexible, and created and re-created as youth interact with others around them. Youth actively negotiate various aspects of their environments and make deliberate, strategic choices about how they are expressed within different human interactions. Youth use their identities to achieve specific material/economic and psychological/emotional goals. In addition, these youth draw on their "identity capital" to challenge and reshape oppressive power dynamics that exist in the broader, Canadian context.

In this chapter, I discuss the contributions this research makes to the field of social work, with respect to both theory/research and practice. I follow this with a summary of the limitations of this work, and conclude by offering some concrete suggestions for future research in this area.

Contributions to the Field of Social Work

Social Work Theory and Research

The present study makes two contributions to the field of social work theory and research. First, this work represents a departure from conventional examinations of identity in ethno-racially diverse youth. Specifically, (as described in detail in previous sections), most current research views identity as a fixed variable that is related particular behavioural or mental health outcomes. Identity is studied as though it is a static, unitary property, using quantitative methods like questionnaires. In the present study, a more open-ended method of gathering data was used (i.e., the qualitative interview) in order to tap into identity as a fluid, dynamic process. Here, I have 1) adopted a dynamic, process-focused view of identity; and 2) employed a corresponding qualitative methodology that is capable of capturing the multi-dimensional, subjective processes underlying identity and its expression in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth. Instead of attempting to use objective measures to tap into subjective processes, I have drawn from particular theoretical frameworks that focus on fluidity and dynamism, and chosen a methodology that is consistent with the goal of capturing these processes.

Second, research on identity in ethno-racially diverse youth, to date, has focused primarily on the experiences of *newcomer* youth, and has not typically considered the experiences of youth who have been raised entirely within North America. As they are

influenced by both a particular ethnic/racial history as well as a personal history grounded in “Canadian” experiences, ethno-racially diverse youth who have grown up entirely in Canada may deal with many of the same concerns as their newcomer counterparts, but likely face *particular* challenges in constructing identities that simultaneously admit and resist elements of both their parents’ and Canadian cultures. This work has focused on how living in a heterogeneous environment can impact how ethno-racially diverse youth see themselves, and has considered various outcomes related to this view of self.

Social Work Practice

As described at in the previous chapter, the present work represents a shift away from seeing youth from non-dominant ethnic/racial backgrounds as possibly “at-risk” for various negative psychological and behavioural outcomes. Although youth certainly experience racism and prejudice, value and role conflict, and family struggles during their adolescent and young adult years, findings from the current study illustrate that youth are well-placed to effectively manage these challenges, and do so successfully.

The findings from this study can assist social work practitioners to counsel second-generation, ethno-racially diverse Canadian youth and their families in ways that acknowledge their unique circumstances. In supporting ethno-racially diverse youth, for example, some therapists adopt the view that individuals should strive to maintain consistency in psychological experiences in order to preserve psychological health (Suh, 2002). This is an obvious challenge for individuals who have a distinct ethnic/racial identity *as well as* a strong Canadian identity. The current research shows, however, that the ability to strategically foreground particular dimensions of their identities as required

by particular situations (e.g., “doing Canadian” or “doing South Asian”) provides ethno-racially diverse youth with the ability to adapt to a wide range of circumstances. The flexibility and dynamism of these identities enables youth to strategically draw from both cultural stores, and express their selves in a range of ways that helps them to achieve specific goals and manage the challenges that often arise based on their minority status. This aspect of their identities, then, should be viewed as an indicator of youths’ resiliency and psychological well-being, and not as a problem that needs to be resolved.

In terms of support at the family level, difficulties experienced by ethno-racially diverse families are often seen as the result of parents and children who exhibit different levels of acculturation (e.g., Baptiste, 1993; Farver et al., 2002). Services, therefore, have often had the goal of “saving” children from what social workers have typically (and erroneously) perceived as the generally uniform, “restrictive, traditionally rooted” practices of their parents (Maiter et al., 1999). Instead, by providing dynamic, process-focused insight into how ethnicity and race are implicated in identity issues, findings from the present work will contribute to a more balanced view of the variability in parenting practices, and family transitions and experiences as they take place within culturally heterogeneous contexts.

Many authors highlight the stress and strain of living with hyphenated identities, especially when race and ethnicity intersect with other identity dimensions like gender and class (e.g., Gupta, 1999; Handa, 2003). The current research shows, however, that these various dimensions provide youth with multiple opportunities for expression. These possibilities allow youth to use their identities in ways that are strategic and appropriate, and contribute to youths’ adaptability. These findings, then, highlight the resiliency of

second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth, and support a strengths-based perspective of identity in ethno-racially diverse adolescents and young adults more generally.

Limitations of the Present Study

The current research has three main limitations. The first concerns the homogeneity of the sample studied. The focus of this research was on the experiences of one ethno-racial group (i.e., South Asian-Canadians), living in one geographic area (i.e., Ottawa, Ontario, Canada). The sample was also homogeneous in terms of socio-economic status and level of education. Specifically, all of the women and men who took part in this study were middle class, university-educated youth.

This homogeneity can be explained in two ways. First, a snowball sampling strategy was used. Given that individuals who have taken part in the research were asked to suggest names of other, potential participants, there was an increased likelihood that these individuals would share similar key characteristics. Second, the youth who took part in this study were between the ages 18-25. In most cases then, the parents of these youth had arrived in Canada during the 1970s, and were therefore admitted under the “points system”. As described in Chapter Two, most South Asians immigrating to Canada at this time were well-educated professionals who had both access to and the ability to secure additional resources. Together, then, the homogeneity of this sample can be explained by the sampling strategy used, as well as the age range sampled and the corresponding time of parental immigration.

The second limitation of this study also relates to the homogeneity of the sample, but focuses particularly on how these youth consistently oriented to certain, specific

dimensions of identity when asked to describe how they see themselves. Recall that while race, gender, and class were used as entry points to understand youths' identities, most participants also discussed a range of other identity dimensions (including nationality, religion, ethnicity/culture, and aspects related to their role within the family, and the different activities in which they take part). Curiously, these youth did not talk about certain other critical sites of identity that likely have an important impact on the way we see ourselves. For example, these young women and men did not identify themselves in terms of sexual identity (e.g., heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual, transgendered), ability/disability, or mental health.

The fact that these additional, yet significant dimensions of identity were not discussed might be explained in two ways. First, one could assume that these particular aspects of identity were considered to be "too private" to discuss within the context of a formal interview with a virtual stranger. A second (and more likely) possibility, however, is that these elements of identity were *de-selected* or made less salient since they are consistent with society's broader heterosexual, able, and "mentally healthy" norm. In other words, those identity aspects that reflect what is considered to be "normal" in terms of the prevailing social order become less salient to these youth.

This was evident, for example, in youths' discussions of class. Recall that youth had to be probed to identify this as a relevant characteristic of their identities, but did not choose to elaborate upon the significance of their middle-class socio-economic status, its role in the way they see themselves, etc. spontaneously the way they did with race or nationality (i.e., aspects that differ from the norm). Similarly, the young men in this study did not speak to the issue of gender unless they were probed. Again, this is not surprising

given that maleness, like being a member of the middle class, plays a key role in what is considered “normal” in our culture.

Therefore, from what they shared in interviews, it is likely that these youth viewed their sexuality, ability/disability, and mental health as reflecting the norm in society, resulting in the “de-selection” of these identity dimensions. A way of attempting to capture these aspects in future studies, then, would be to probe youth to think about their identities in terms of *both* what is similar to and different from what is “normal” in society, and ask them to elaborate further upon each of these.

Finally, this study is limited in terms of its ability to fully capture the flexibility of identity. Throughout this research, I have suggested that youths’ identities are flexible, both across situations, and over time. Our understanding of these processes, however, is limited to a particular time period: late adolescence and young adulthood. While this has provided us with critical insights, future research should attempt to take a more longitudinal approach to understanding the transformations of these views of self with various life experiences.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the limitations described above, the findings from this study provide a useful starting point from which to explore important issues related to identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth specifically, and ethno-racially diverse youth more generally. The following are suggestions for future research in this area:

- 1) **Focus more deeply on the role of race in identity.** In terms of their national identifications, the youth in the present research expressed feeling both Canadian *and* South Asian. Despite this duality, however, their race was cited as being a

visible marker that made it impossible for them to ever truly be “real” (read “white”) Canadians. This issue might be explored in more depth, for example, by comparing the experiences of second-generation, ethnically diverse youth who are white, with those who are racialized; or by studying these processes in biracial youth, who have “legitimate” ties to a distinct ethnic/racial group, as well as the mainstream, (“white”) Canadian society.

- 2) **Investigate the impact of class and education on the ease with which ethno-racially diverse youth use their identities.** As described above, those who took part in this study were all university-educated, middle class youth. It can be assumed, therefore, that these youth have increased access to resources (e.g., economic stability, advanced education) that may enhance their ability to “do Canadian” or “do South Asian” where required. In addition, it is likely that these youth have many more opportunities to practice these skills, and gain “identity capital” through participating in many varied interactions. The impact of class and education on the strategic use of identities, therefore, might be explored by studying these processes in a more economically and educationally diverse sample of youth.
- 3) **Examine ethno-racially diverse youths’ views of Canadian multiculturalism.** The youth in the present research often referred to multiculturalism in Canada as a unique and positive ideology. Their experiences with racism and prejudice (both overt and covert), however, suggest that the way that the relationship between the way these values are articulated and how they are practiced is more complex. These ideas might be probed further in order to understand how living within this

sometimes ambiguous context affects the way that ethno-racially diverse youth see themselves.

- 4) **Explore the importance of space in creating a sense of community among ethno-racially diverse youth.** The youth in this study expressed finding comfort and enjoyment from being with other South Asian-Canadians (i.e., those who share similar ethnic/racial roots, as well as the national identification “Canadian”). Opportunities for socializing with others who are like them are supported by the existence of designated spaces that are created especially to “do South Asian” (e.g., clubs, prayer halls)³⁴. Of particular interest, however, are instances when youth carve out space for themselves within mainstream settings, erecting *symbolic* rather than physical boundaries that exclude members of the mainstream. At the University of Ottawa, for example, the Sciences, Technology, and Engineering Building (SITE) is “the place” where South Asian-Canadian youth congregate. The youth in this study often referred to SITE as “Brown Town”, a place where they can come together to socialize, share practical information, gain social support, and maintain their ethno-racial and cultural heritage. Understanding how such spaces are created, their functions and purposes, and their impact on the way ethno-racially diverse youth see themselves might be both theoretically and practically significant.
- 5) **Explore the concept of “identity capital” in more depth.** The notion of “identity capital” was used in the present research as a way of understanding how second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth achieve particular goals, and

³⁴ This is consistent with other research that focuses on the importance of “place” for members of ethnic/racial/cultural minority groups (e.g., Bella, 2001; Iosifides & King, 1998; Malone, 2001).

manage the challenges that often arise when living as a minority in an ethnically/racially diverse environment. This concept, its features, and the processes underlying its development might be investigated more deeply both within and across groups of ethno-racially diverse youth.

This dissertation document has described a project that explored identity in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth. By using a grounded theory approach, and a corresponding qualitative methodology, this study has provided a process-focused understanding of these youths' personal, social, and situated identities. The knowledge produced by this research reflects a dynamic, strengths-based understanding of how these youths interact with their environments to produce particular identities.

As the geographic boundaries that separate different cultures continue to be challenged, and as communities become more and more diverse, understandings of the changes that arise from living within heterogeneous contexts, and their implications for the psychological health of youth growing up within these settings are essential. These insights are critically important for those creating knowledge in the field of social work, and for practitioners striving to meet the needs of Canada's increasingly diverse population of youth.

Table 1

Summary of Main Findings, Categories, and Key Themes

Research Question	Main Finding	Categories	Key Themes
<p>1. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth describe their identities?</p>	<p>Youths identities are multidimensional. These dimensions are inter-related in many meaningful and complex ways.</p>	<p>Race. Gender. Class. Religion. Nationality. Ethnicity/culture. Other dimensions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth are part of the racial grouping “brown”. • Youth are part of the broader group “visible minority”. • Racial distinctions are seen as exclusionary. • Gender distinctions are based on cultural stereotypes (e.g., the “Good South Asian girl” vs. “Canadian girl”). • Class distinctions are irrelevant. • Caste distinctions are symbolically relevant. • Youth identify with religion at low, moderate, and high levels. • The strength of religious identification impacts social relationships. • National identities are multiple. Youth identify themselves as both “Canadian” and “South Asian”. • This results in the hyphenated identification “Indo-Canadian” or “South Asian-Canadian”. • The terms “Canadian” and “white” are equivalent. • National identity is affected by geography. • Youth identify themselves ethnically/culturally as Indian/South Asian. • Despite great variability among Indian/South Asians, youth discuss the importance of common roots which inform values and norms. These are transmitted through family. • “Child of immigrants”, “student”, “family member”, and identities related to extracurricular activities.

<p>2. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth describe the two main portions of their national identities: the Canadian and the South Asian?</p>	<p>Youths identities are flexible, and change both across situations and over a lifetime.</p>	<p>Youth distinguish between “Canadian” and “South Asian” national identities.</p> <p>Identities shift across situations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinctions between “Canadian” and “South Asian” identities are discussed in 5 key areas: activities, race, focus of lifestyle, values, and family dynamics. • Youth view themselves as both “Canadian” and “South Asian”, and express each to different degrees depending on the context. • Youth feel more Canadian when taking part in “Canadian” activities, expressing particular “Canadian” values, being around “Canadians” (i.e., people who are white), and being around South Asians from India. • Youth feel more South Asian when taking part in “South Asian” activities, and expressing particular “South Asian” values. Being around other South Asians makes youth feel more South Asian in a positive way. Being around “Canadians” (i.e., people who are white) makes youth feel more South Asian way that highlights their differences.
<p>3. What critical elements do youth describe as shaping the expression of their identities?</p>	<p>The expression of identity at any one time/place is the result of the dynamic interplay between 4 major elements: personal interests, the family, relationship with the South Asian community, and the nature of the</p>	<p>Identities shift over a lifetime.</p> <p>Personal interests.</p> <p>The family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth negotiate and re-negotiate their identities to reflect different degrees of their Canadian-ness and South Asian-ness at various points over a lifetime. • Youth discuss consciously engaging in this process of negotiation/re-negotiation at two points in their lives to date: during childhood (when they first became aware of racial distinctions), and during adolescence (as they confronted identity issues more generally). • Identity is created and re-created, in part, as a result of youths’ personal desires to learn more about and connect with either their Canadian-ness or their South Asian-ness. • The family plays a key role in shaping the expression of identity by both modelling “South Asian” activities and transmitting “South Asian” values.

	surrounding environment.	Relationship with the South Asian community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The family is so critical in shaping the expression of identity that a change in the family can create important changes in the expression of identity. • When youth have positive relationships with other South Asians, the resultant feelings of belonging, acceptance, and sense of community and shared values leads to a high level of expressed South Asian-ness. • When youth have ambivalent or negative relationships with other South Asians, the result is often a high level of expressed Canadian-ness. • Living in a city/town with few other South Asians and a general lack of ethno-racial diversity typically leads to low levels of expressed South Asian-ness. This is due to the absence of opportunities for such expressions, as well as a desire to “fit in” with the mainstream. • Living in cities/towns with a strong South Asian community and a general acceptance of ethno-racial diversity provides increased opportunities for youth to participate in shared cultural activities. This often leads to a higher level of expressed South Asian-ness. • Expressions of identity are often shaped by youths’ experiences with racism, and prejudicial attitudes within the South Asian community.
4. How do second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth use their identities in interactions with others in their social environments?	Youth are strategic in expressing their identities. Youth are experts in 1) assessing a particular situation, 2) determining the most appropriate “self” to foreground from an array of	Racism and discrimination in multicultural Canada takes on different forms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity/fascination with youths ethno-racial roots combined with questions about where youth are “really” from creates psychological distance between participants and their mainstream counterparts. • Youth are also seen as purveyors of the South Asian culture

	<p>identity choices, and 3) executing expressions of identity that are likely to produce the outcome most in their favour.</p>	<p>To manage the contradictions between the ideology of multiculturalism and its everyday practice, youth “Do South Asian” when it helps them to achieve certain goals, or provides them with particular advantages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Doing South Asian” helps youth to gain material advantages and “perks”. • “Doing South Asian” helps youth to access South Asian networks and connections. • “Doing South Asian” can provide youth with advantages in employment. • Youth “do South Asian” to gain psychological power. • Youth experience emotional advantages from “doing South Asian”.
		<p>Youth also “Do Canadian” when it helps them to achieve certain goals, or provides them with particular advantages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth “do Canadian” to gain social and professional legitimacy. • Youth “do Canadian” to gain or maintain a sense of belonging. • “Doing Canadian” is particularly useful when travelling abroad.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

There are lots of different ways of thinking about the term “identity”. During our discussion today, I’d like us to think of “identity” as the different ways that we see or understand ourselves, in relation to different social groups or categories. For example, I might see myself as a woman, as a South Asian-Canadian, as a doctoral student, etc.

- 1) I’d like to begin by asking you about the different ways that you see yourself. What different groups or categories would you use to describe your identity, or your sense of self?
Probes:
 - a. What about race?
 - b. What about gender?
 - c. What about class?
 - d. What about religion?
 - e. What about nationality?
 - f. What about ethnicity?
 - g. Any other categories?

- 2) Have these identities changed at different points in your life?
 - a. If so, when? Why might this have happened? How?
 - b. If not, why do you think they’ve stayed the same?

- 3) In this next question, I’d like to focus a bit more on your “South Asian-ness”.
 - a. When did being South Asian start making a difference, if ever it did?
 - b. What experiences have you had that have made you feel like someone who is South Asian?
 - c. How do you feel being South Asian influences your day-to-day life?
 - d. Are there particular people/places/events/activities that make you feel more South Asian?
 - e. Are there particular people/places/events/activities that make you feel less South Asian?
 - f. How would you act when you feel that you are acting “South Asian”?
What does this look like?

- 4) Earlier, you shared that in addition to being South Asian, you also see yourself as having other identities (insert examples). I’d like to ask you some questions about these different “selves”.
 - a. What do these different “selves” look like?
 - b. Are there times when one of these “selves” is more evident than others?
(Probe for specific examples).
 - i. When are these more or less evident? Why?

- 5) I’d like to ask you to think about your life over the last week or so, and the

different things you've done and the places you've been. Can you tell me about some of these different situations, and the people you've interacted with over the past week? (Probe for school, work, social activities with family or friends, etc.).

- a. In these different situations, were there aspects of your identity that you think you presented more strongly than others?
 - i. Which ones?
 - ii. Under what circumstances?
 - iii. How were these aspects expressed?
 - iv. Why do you think these aspects were highlighted more than other aspects?
 - v. How did others react to the different aspects of yourself that you chose to highlight?
 - vi. How did you feel when you highlighted these different parts of yourself?

- 6) Thank you for talking with me today. Is there anything else you'd like to add to our discussion?

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Gender: _____

What is your place of birth? _____

How many years has your family been in Canada? _____

What is your nationality? _____

What is your religious affiliation? _____

Can you describe who lived in your family home (and your relationships to these people) while you were growing up?

What languages do you speak? _____

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Please check one)

- _____ Some high school
 _____ High school diploma

- Some college/university
 College/university degree
 Graduate degree
 Professional degree/diploma

What is your family's average yearly income? (Please check one)

- \$0 - \$29,000
 \$30,000 - \$39,000
 \$40,000 - \$49,000
 \$50,000 - \$59,000
 \$60,000 - \$69,000
 \$70,000 and above

What is your current occupation(s)?

What is your marital status? (Please check one)

- Married
 Separated/divorced
 Single

Do you have children? If so, what are their genders and ages?

Thank you for taking part in this study.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

- ✓ Are you between 18-25 years old?
- ✓ Is your ethno-racial background South Asian?
- ✓ Have you been raised mostly in Canada?

If you answered, “yes” to these questions, you are invited to take part in a research study exploring “identity” in South Asian-Canadian adolescents and young adults.

As a research participant, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview that will focus on different aspects of your identity. This interview will last between 1½ to 2 hours.

By taking part in this study, you will be contributing to knowledge that can help shape different services and supports for other young people from diverse ethno-racial backgrounds.

You will receive \$20 for your participation.

**Confidentiality will be maintained at all times,
and your privacy will be protected.**

For more information or if you would like to take part in this study, please contact Purnima at (613) 853-3568.

This study is being conducted as doctoral research by Purnima Sundar (Doctoral Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University) under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Maiter (smaiter@wlu.ca). This study has been approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University’s Research Ethics Board.

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APPENDIX C

Information Sheet and Consent Form

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

“Identity Formation and Expression in Second-Generation, South Asian-Canadian Youth”

Principal Investigator: Purnima Sundar, Doctoral Candidate
Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON
Sund2601@mach1.wlu.ca
(613) 853-3568

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Identity Formation in Second-Generation, South Asian-Canadian Youth”. The purpose of this study is to understand how identity is created and experienced by second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth (between ages 18-25), raised mainly within a Canadian, multicultural context. A written report of the findings of this study will be produced in order to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral dissertation project in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Background to the Study

The rationale for this project is based on a review of current research that indicates a shortage of information in this area. Whereas research on the social, emotional, and psychological needs of *newcomer* youth is increasing, little attention has been paid to experiences of ethnically and/or racially diverse adolescents and young adults who have spent the majority of their lives in Canada. The latter group is influenced both by a distinct ethnic/racial history as well as a personal history grounded in “Canadian” experiences. As such, members of this group may confront many of the same concerns as newcomer youth, but likely face *particular* challenges in constructing identities that simultaneously admit and resist elements of both their parents’ and mainstream cultures. These experiences can have significant occupational, ideological, and relational implications for youths’ adult lives. Insight into these experiences as they occur specifically in second-generation, South Asian-Canadian youth will help to broaden the scope of research in this area, as well as contribute to services that support youth more generally during this critical time in life.

Your Role as a Research Participant

Your participation has been requested because you possess valuable experiential knowledge in this area. As one of 30 participants (15 young women and 15 young men), you will be involved in an interview conducted by the principal investigator. With your consent, the interview will be audio-taped so that it can be transcribed and analyzed. The interview will take place for approximately one and a half hours, and will not exceed two hours.

Before you decide whether or not to participate in this study, you will be provided with a copy of the Interview Guide so that you may judge your level of comfort with regard to the issues to be discussed throughout the interview. You reserve the right to refuse to answer any question or address any topic you wish not to discuss. You are guaranteed, both verbally and in writing, that **all information arising from this study will be held in the strictest of confidence**. No names or identifying statements will be used in the written report. Before they appear in the final report, you will have the opportunity to review quotations to ensure that they are accurate, and do not contain any identifying information.

All audio-tapes, transcriptions, and notes will not be heard/seen by anyone other than the principal investigator. In some instances, a research assistant (who has signed a confidentiality agreement) will be involved in transcribing interview tapes, but this person will not have access to your name or any identifying information. All electronic transcripts/notes will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigator. All raw data will be destroyed 7 years after this study has been completed.

Feedback and Publication

You will receive a transcript of your interview in order to provide you with the opportunity to check for accuracy, make any additions or deletions you wish, and to gain your feedback about the issues discussed in the interview.

Research results will be published in the principal investigator's doctoral dissertation. The estimated date of completion is August, 2006. In addition, these findings will be published in peer-reviewed journals, and will be presented at various conferences. You are assured, however, that your identity will be protected at all times.

Risks and Benefits

There are no direct psychological or emotional risks to participation in this research. It is possible, however, that discussing personal experiences with the researcher may be uncomfortable for some participants. In order to minimize this risk, I will attempt to maximize your physical comfort by conducting the interview in a location determined by you. In addition, you are assured that all information you share in the context of this interview will be held in the strictest of confidence, with no names or identifying statements being used in the written report. You have the right to skip over any topic or question you wish not to discuss, and you may stop the interview/withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. I will answer any questions arising from the interview process that you may have as directly and honestly as possible. Finally, I will be available for debriefing following the interview. If this is insufficient, a list of appropriate counselling supports in your area will be made available to you.

Great consideration and effort have taken place in order to minimize any risks you may suffer as a participant in this research. This is because sharing your personal experiences

within the context of this study facilitates a greater understanding of this topic. If you should choose *not* to participate or wish to discontinue your participation *at any time*, you will experience no penalty. In addition, all data pertaining to your interview will be promptly destroyed.

Compensation

For participating in this study, you will receive a gift of \$20. If you choose to withdraw your participation before completing the study, this gift is yours to keep.

Contact Information

You are invited to ask questions at any time before, during, or after the completion of this study by contacting the researcher, Purnima Sundar, at (613) 853-3568 or purnimasundar@hotmail.com, or the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Sarah Maiter (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University) at (519) 884-0710, ext. 2035 or smaiter@wlu.ca.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

Consent

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

**Would you like to receive a copy of the findings of this research? (Check one).

_____ Yes _____ No

Full name and mailing address:

**Would you like to be contacted in the future if additional opportunities to take part in other research in this subject area become available? _____ Yes _____ No

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