

**Identity Formation and Negotiation of Afghan Female Youth
in Ontario**

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Abstract

The following thesis provides an empirical case study in which a group of 6 first generation female Afghan Canadian youth is studied to determine their identity negotiation and development processes in everyday experiences. This process is investigated across different contexts of home, school, and the community. In terms of schooling experiences, 2 participants each are selected representing public, Islamic, and Catholic schools in Southern Ontario. This study employs feminist research methods and is analyzed through a convergence of critical race theory (critical race feminism), youth development theory, and feminist theory. Participant experiences reveal issues of racism, discrimination, and bias within schooling (public, Catholic) systems. Within these contexts, participants suppress their identities or are exposed to negative experiences based on their ethnic or religious identification. Students in Islamic schools experience support for a more positive ethnic and religious identity. Home and community provided nurturing contexts where participants are able to reaffirm and develop a positive overall identity.

Acknowledgements

My Lord, increase me in knowledge (Quran 20:114)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The following thesis provides an empirical case study in which a group of 6 female Afghan Canadian youth is studied to determine their identity negotiation and development processes in relation to their everyday lives. This process is investigated across different contexts of home, school, and community. The research focus is of importance in relation to a recent report published by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2010) which demonstrates there is growing evidence indicating that immigrants in Canada fare better than in other Western democracies. This has contributed to Canadian society becoming more culturally and religiously diverse. According to the 2006 Census, Canadian immigrants represent over 200 ethnic groups (Statistics Canada, Ethnocultural portrait, 2006). Of these ethnic groups, the following research study focuses on Afghan Canadians as this is an ethnic group relatively absent in Canadian research literature. It is also a group which I belong to as a female Afghan Canadian. As of 2006, at the national level, there are 48, 090 (23, 835 females) Afghan Canadians, with 31, 295 (15, 485 females) currently living in Ontario. As Canada continues to become more multicultural, the concept of ethnic self-identification will become increasingly important. Although first generation Canadian children are born in their host country, they have parents who were born outside of the host country who typically remain loyal in their connections to both their home and host country after immigration (Zimmerman, Aberle, & Krafchick, 2005). However, it is uncertain whether or not these ties are enduring for their children, who are identified in the literature as first generation immigrants (Zimmerman et al.). Not all young first and second generation immigrants

consider their ethnicity (or parental cultural heritage) as an important dimension of their identity (Gallant, 2008).

This study will examine the everyday life experiences of six Southern Ontarian (Greater Toronto Area, Blue Lake, and Valley Hills¹), urban based first generation young Afghan Muslim women as they negotiate their emerging sense of identity in three locations: community, home, and school. These three contexts are areas within which youth must navigate between while formulating their identity (Lerner, 2002). In relation to school settings, the participants represent the different school systems in Ontario as follows: Catholic, public, and private religious based (Islamic schools). Across the three contexts, school, home, and community, my research study examines how (and if) these young girls, ages 14-18, come to terms with their own cultural, religious, and racial identities. Presently, the majority of existing research on minority/immigrant youth and identity is predominantly conducted in the United States (Khanlou, Koh, & Mill, 2008). One of the risks involved in utilizing American research points to adopting risky generalizations of youth experiences in the Canadian context given distinct social and immigration policy differences between the two nations.

Therefore, there is a need to explore the experiences of Canadian immigrant youth. There is a broader significance in investigating the voices of marginalized women in Canadian society as they too often “form a silent majority whose subjugated knowledge and histories of resistance seem never to go beyond their immediate environments” (Bobb-Smith, 2003, p. 1). This study will be among the first empirical

¹ Due to participant confidentiality, the names of smaller cities/towns in Southern Ontario have been replaced with pseudonyms.

study conducted on the female Afghan Canadian population. This study is, therefore, not only a response to the gap in Canadian literature, it also contributes internationally to the scarce literature on Afghan youth, particularly females.

Operational Definitions

Terminology is an inevitable challenge, as many terms, concepts, and ideas are subject to debates in the field; therefore, the following list will define terms and meanings not only as they are featured in the literature but more specifically in relation to how they are used in the present thesis.

First-generation immigrants are born in Canada to immigrant parents. They have been raised and educated in Canada. While some parents have passed along and transmitted aspects of their country of origin (e.g., language, values, music) to their children, other parents may have embraced their new host country without bearing a strong emphasis on their birth countries' traditions and culture (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001).

Biculturalism involves development of a sense of cultural self (e.g., ethnicity) with membership in more than one group based on one's cultural, ethnic, or racial identifications (Marks, Patton, & Garcia Coll, 2011). Bicultural or biculturalism can also refer to the ability to navigate across different cultural domains.

Cultural groups are more inclusive than ethnic groups, as its members include physical objectives, experiences, beliefs, and norms (Foster and Martinez, 1995; Triandis et al., 1980).

Ethnic group refers to a group wherein the members share a similar heritage including practices, values, and beliefs (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1983; Ocampo,

Bernal, & Knight, 1993). Members of such groups share a common exposure to various learned cultural elements and characteristics (Phinney, 1996).

Ethnic identity is best defined by Phinney (2003) who refers to it as a multidimensional construct referring to

one's identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group... Ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization, but rather is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background. Ethnic identity is constructed and modified as individuals become aware of their ethnicity, with in the large (sociocultural) setting (2003, p. 63)

Ethnic-racial socialization is a reference to the type of messages transmitted to children and adolescents about their race and/or ethnicity. Parents communicate these messages to their children in the form of cultural socialization (encouraging pride and appreciation toward ones ethnicity) and preparation for bias, preparing children for potential discrimination and racism (Hughes et al., 2006).

Hijab is a head garment worn by Muslim women covering the hair and neck. Although it is not mandated in the Quran, it is recommended for women as a sign of modesty and devotion to their religion.

Identity negotiation is the "movement or navigation between experienced memberships and various sets or norms and values- as desirable, abstract goals" (Kuusisto, 2010, p. 780).

"*Othered*" or "*Othering*" is a process of identity construction in relation to others through "mark[ing] and name[ing] those thought to be different from oneself" (Weis,

1995, p. 17). “Othering” is a validation and reproduction of the positions of dominance and subordination (Fine, 1994).

Stereotypical oppression “the marginalization of a person based on who others believe they are” and is usually designed “to the detriment of the marginalized” (Berry, 2009, p. 751).

Background

Research studies focusing on Western youth, often acknowledge Erikson’s (1963, 1968) conventional life stage virtues associated with identity, love, work, and ideology, to help identify integral issues for adolescents’ throughout their development (Arnett, 2001; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 1980). However, as Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli (2004) point out, such confirmation of Erikson’s (1963, 1968) traditional values is based primarily on research involving White, middle-class samples (Marcia, 1966, 1980; Waterman, Geary, & Waterman, 1974; Waterman & Goldman, 1976). Nonetheless, Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli do acknowledge the work other scholars have done in asserting that the process of identity development is different across ethnically diverse adolescents in the Western context. For ethnically diverse adolescents, the process of identity development is, thus, a challenge as there necessitates the need to first define the role and significance of ethnicity, as well as negotiating exactly what the term identity entails for individual adolescents (Phinney, 1990). My research will contribute to the growing literature on youth identity in focusing on immigrant adolescents, specifically Afghan females, and how they define the role and significance of their ethnic identity. This research makes a significant contribution in that its’ focus on racialized Afghan females is an area which, to my knowledge, is overlooked.

Background of Youth and Ethnic Identity in Past Research

As Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli (2004) state, in reference to Latino youth, ethnically diverse adolescents need to develop their own sense of ethnic identity. The significance of a positive and accurate sense of ethnic identity is stressed in research (see Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997) linking positive, healthy ethnic identity development to a positive development of self-esteem, self-concept, positive social communication and interaction, amongst other benefits, according to Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli. As Phinney (1989) states, “the failure of minority adolescents to deal with their ethnicity could have negative implications, such as poor self-image or a sense of alienation” (pp. 38-39). Other social psychologists, such as Tajfel (1978) and Phinney (1990) stress the importance of developing a healthy sense of ethnic identity for disparaged minority group members who may endure psychological conflict. Such conflict can cause minority group members to make a choice between “accepting the negative views of society toward their group, or rejecting them in a search for their own identity” (Phinney, 1989, p. 34). The importance of a positive ethnic identity has been discussed in research studies such as one by Phinney and Alipuria (1990) who found that a positive ethnic identity in college students is significantly related to positive self-esteem.

Identity Theories

There exists empirical research on experiences of immigrant youth in negotiating and identifying their identities (ethnic or religious), as well as some of the struggles that they may experience during this process (e.g., Berry, 1997; Fuligni, 1998; Oppedal, Røysamb & Heyerdahl, 2005; Phinney, 2003; Phinney, Horenczyk, Leibkind, & Vedder,

2001; Rumbaut, 1994; Way & Robinson, 2003; Zhou, 1997). There are alternative (nonmainstream) models regarding identity development in young children and adolescence (Figure 1 Identity theories, shows the relationship between the various identity theories discussed).

Marcia's (1966) ego identity model investigates four identity statuses, diffused, foreclosed, moratorium and achieved which individuals can experience when formulating and negotiating their identity. Marcia's (1966) work has been altered by Phinney (1989, 1992) who suggests three stages of ethnic identity development; an initial stage called diffusion/foreclosure, a moratorium stage, and an achieved ethnic identity where one has explored and accepted their ethnicity. Berry's (1980, 1997) acculturation theory adapts Marcia's (1966) and Phinney's (1989, 1992) work and provides four strategies which can be employed by immigrants in a new host country; assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). The following study will use Phinney (1989, 1992) and Berry's (1980, 1997) models of youth identity development theories as both are very similar.

Identifying Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the identity negotiation and development process of Afghan female youth as this is an area overlooked in Western research literature. When investigating immigrant ethnic identity development and negotiation, it is vital to keep in mind the fact that the process is different across ethnically diverse adolescents (Ontai-Grzebiak & Raffaelli, 2004). A literature search within the broader scope of identity development of Muslims in Canada or the United States came across a wide range of Canadian and American based studies on Muslim

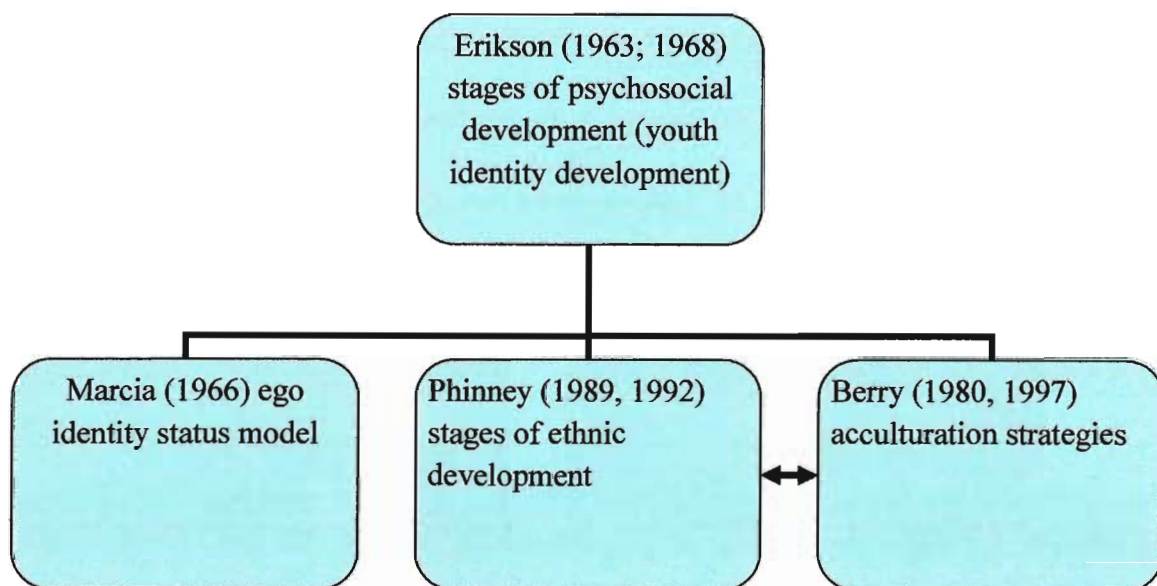


Figure 1. Identity theories.

youth (Ajrouch, 2004; Ajrouch & Jamal, 2007; Britto & Amer, 2007; Britto, 2007, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Sirin & Balsano, 2007; Sirin, & Fine, 2007; Zine, 1997, 2000, 2001).

A more narrowed search to studies on *female* Muslim youth provided some results (Hamdani, 2004; Haw, 1994, 1998; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Zine, 2002, 2006). As research interests are on the identity development and negotiation of *Afghan Canadian* females, the search was further narrowed to female Afghan Canadian youth (using search terms; Afghan*, female* and/or girl* and/or women*, identit*, Muslim and/or Islam*) which did not return with many results other than a brief article on negotiating Afghan identity within the Afghan Diaspora throughout the world (Sadat, 2008). As rare as the article may seem, it is not specific nor relevant to this particular research study as it does not target my specific population, Muslim Afghan Canadian (or American) females. A research paper by Khanlou et al. (2008), although on cultural identity of Afghan youth, was more focused on mental health and shared its focus with Iranian youth which sort of weakened its focus, not to mention the fact that it did not separate Afghan female youth from male youth.

Significance of Research

Despite the abundance of research on Muslim youth or Muslim female youth, there remains a dearth of empirical studies on Afghan females and their identity negotiation and ethnic development. Research studies based on identity negotiation of South Asian Muslim females (Samuels, 2004) or Arab Muslim females living in the West is insufficient. Even though there are both geographical and cultural similarities between these two ethnic groups in relation with Afghans, researchers need to be aware of danger

of treating diverse groups of people who share commonalities as one, “the assumption of homogeneity of experience of children within cultures, without empirical evidence, is unwarranted...A similar error is to treat national or ethnic status as equivalent to a common cultural experience for individuals” (Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan, 1988, p. 328). What becomes evident, thus, is the gap in literature surrounding Afghan females’ identity negotiation and transformation. Although research studies at times generalize the experiences of Afghan females with that of all Muslim youth, or South Asian females, or Arab Muslim females, this can essentially be an inaccurate representation of Afghan females as they have diverse experiences based on their cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic identifications.

Research Focus

In this era of global migratory movements, young people constantly face conflicting cultural and social pressures in their new homelands. This is particularly true for young people whose culture, language, and traditions are far from the norm of what has, until recently, been considered the mainstream of Canadian society. This qualitative research study examines how a sample of first generation Afghan Canadian females form and negotiate their sense of identity in the Canadian urban setting. A total of six participants from urban Ontario participated in semistructured interviews. These participants are all first generation Afghan Canadians who themselves were born in Canada, but their parents were born in Afghanistan. Participants’ ethnic backgrounds represent diverse geographical regions from Afghanistan such as Nangarhar, Laghman, Kabul and Kandahar. There is great tribal and linguistic diversity within these geographical regions. For example, within the province of Nangarhar which is mostly a

Pashto speaking province, there are several different ethnic subtribes, as well as linguistic dialects. The complexities within Afghan linguistic and ethnic tribes are important to consider because all Afghan experiences cannot be generalized into one overarching category. Afghans represent diverse identities depending on their linguistic or tribal affiliations and, thus, cannot be homogenized into one category.

It is important to look at participant experiences in home, school, and community because youth development theory cites these locations as contexts within which youth develop and negotiate their identities (Lerner, 2005). The participants represent three very different educational experiences in Canada; public, Catholic, and Islamic schools. Two females each attend public, Catholic, and Islamic schools. At the onset of the development of this research design, it was expected that there would be a variance in regards to the research participants' identity development across the school types. This variance across schooling type is necessary as schooling and the socialization that it exposes the participants to is an integral part of the identity development process.

It is important to acknowledge that schools are responsible for the perpetuation of "dominant cultural values and ideologies as well as the existing social class structure" (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p. 31). Hebert (2001) too talks about the role that Canadian schools play in producing and reproducing social bias and inequalities regardless of whether such biases are based on "gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, or language" (p. 158). Through school textbooks, events, practices, and voices, minority students are constantly reminded of their inferiority "intellectually, emotionally, physically, and morally" (p. 158). Based on participant experiences, it will be interesting to determine any specific role that the hidden curriculum may play in the development of

female Afghan Canadian identity as further expanded in Chapter Two. The following provides the organization of the thesis sections.

As a female Afghan Canadian, I am an insider to this group of Afghan adolescents in terms of our shared religious identity; however, there is diversity in our ethnicities depending on participants' linguistic or tribal affiliations. As an Afghan, my linguistic identity is as a Pashtun, and my ethnic identity is a Nangarhari Pashtun. While there are more complex diversifications within the region of Nangarhar, examining these is unnecessary within the scope of my study. Nonetheless, at the onset of my research I was unsure if my experiences with discrimination, bias, and victimization would be echoed. There is great diversity in the trajectories of youth identity development, depending on experiences in the home, school, and community (Lerner, 2005). While my experiences within my home have garnered a healthy overall sense of Afghan Canadian Muslim identity, I have faced many hardships within my schooling and community. I have experienced bias, discrimination, and "Othering" in my schooling from my peers, teachers, and the curriculum. Within my experiences with the Afghan community, I have also experienced a similar "Othering", where I felt I did not belong. It is interesting how despite the negative reception my identity as a female Afghan Muslim has afforded me, I still maintain a healthy and proud sense of cultural and religious identity. I have managed to integrate well into both Afghan and Canadian societies. I am able to value and integrate both my identities as an Afghan and Canadian (Berry, 1989).

My experiences will be further explored in Chapter Three where I will discuss my personal critical reflexivity. This reflexivity will be essential for my desire to understand and explore the identity negotiation processes of other female, Afghan adolescents.

Lastly, it is important to mention that it is due to my balanced identity as an Afghan and Canadian female, I am able to have access to and speak comfortably to other Afghan females. I am able to use feminist research approaches, such as interactive dialogical questions, as well as identify rather than keep distance from participants (Reinharz, 1992). My own identity as a female Afghan is integral to this study because only as an Afghan female can I truly understand other Afghan women and their unique experiences (Sarantakos, 2004, p. 67).

Organization of the Document

Chapter One provides an overview of this research study. It positions the research study in the broader context of research and scholarly work on Afghan Canadian female identity development, negotiation, and formation in urban Canada. Chapter One also provided a brief introduction to the conceptual framework within which this research study is positioned.

Chapter Two will expand upon the conceptual frameworks of critical race feminism, youth development theory and feminist theory, as well as provide a more detailed analysis of the literature available on immigrants and minorities' identity development. Chapter Two will also provide a better understanding of Afghan and immigrant youth and some of the obstacles and challenges in Canadian society.

Chapter Three introduces the methodology of feminist research methods and case study, as well as further elaborates on the conceptual framework of the study. This chapter will include how participants were recruited, data collection methods, transcription, coding, analysis conduction, and personal field notes.

Chapter Four will include a brief, biographical introduction to each of the 6 participants. It will then describe emerging themes, and other findings which have arisen out of the participant interviews.

Chapter Five will connect findings to a relevant discussion, reflections, and a conclusion to my research. Recommendations will be made to various stakeholders including community organizers, parents, and Ontario Ministry of Education. Also discussed will be limitations and challenges, along with future implications of this research study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, Canadian society has undergone many economic, political, and social changes. One of the most prevalent changes in Canadian society is the increase in immigration over the past 2 decades. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009), in 2008 alone, Canada had attracted nearly a quarter of a million permanent residents. Furthermore, Canada has achieved the highest relative level of immigration of any major western country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). The chapter discusses the issue of immigration in relation to the issue of the Afghan Diaspora. This chapter will first provide a deeper understanding of the existing literature and theories on immigrant and minority identity development—specifically, I examine issues of ethnicity and culture for minority identity development, and the importance of self-definition and self-esteem in relation to racialized minority youth. Doing so will attempt to provide a context for a better understanding of the Afghan Canadian and immigrant youth on their everyday experiences. After investigating literature on race and identity formation from the 1990s to present, I situate my focus on Afghans in relation to other ethnicities in the greater Canadian population by honing in on research on Muslim females in Canada I then narrow my focus on Afghan Canadians in Canada, before finally focusing on Afghan Canadians in the educational contexts. This process will allow me to provide a critique of conventional identity development in relation to racialized minority youth in order to argue for the importance of marginalized voices such as Afghan youth. However, in order to situate this research in the correct context, I must first provide a theoretical framework within which I intend to further explore this important research.

Integrating Gender and Race Considerations

The following empirical study will include a consideration of feminist theory that aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. I further consider the following empirical study within theories of ethno cultural development in youth which explain the various theories associated with youth ethnic and cultural identity. Both are essential as I am only interested in females' experiences with negotiating and developing their identity in their everyday lives. Furthermore, I will also consider aspects of critical race theory which will help me narrow my focus to racialized women. These issues will be considered using the following framework as seen in Figure 2: Identity negotiation and development of female Afghan Canadian youth framework.

Identity Models

As mentioned in Chapter One, it is important to examine ethnic youth identity development theories which stem from Erickson's (1963) work on immigrant youth development theory. These models explore the various stages of minority youth identity development from different perspectives. One such model is Marcia's (1966) ego identity status model which is an integral aspect of ethnic identity research. Marcia (1966) investigates the concept of the ego-identity and proposes that there are four identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium and achieved) that all individuals pass in interpersonal and ideological matters. Diffused individuals are individuals who have neither found an identity nor are seeking to find one. They are content with their present status. Furthermore, these individuals are not actively seeking to discover who they are, an integral question for adolescence (Branch, 1999). Foreclosed individuals have assumed an identity that has already been created for them by influential members such

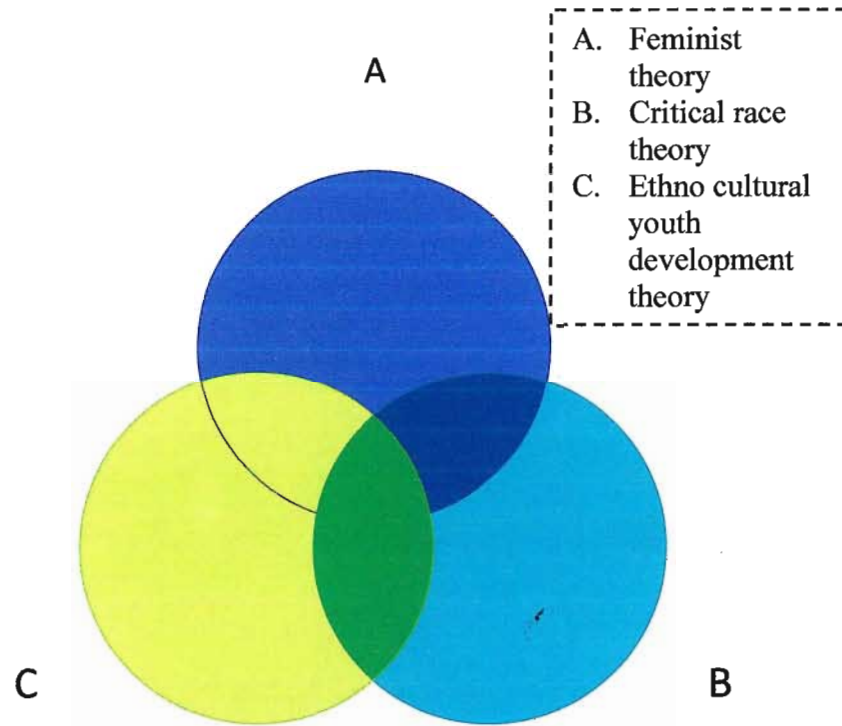


Figure 2. Identity negotiation and development of female Afghan Canadian youth framework

as parents, friends, and/or teachers. Individuals in a moratorium state are in search of their identity and have not developed a strong sense of it yet.

Finally, achieved identity refers to those individuals who have achieved a comfortable sense of identity. These individuals are content with who they are ethnically and able to practice their religious or cultural activities with confidence in knowing the purpose and reasoning behind it. Branch (1999) states “this conceptualization of adolescence as a transitory developmental period has enjoyed a high level of acceptance among theorists” (p. 13). Additionally, Branch states that race is a critical factor in the shaping of environments for youth. As a result of this, race has continuous influences on the ecological niches that shape and transform the lives of youth (1999). Marcia’s (1966) findings have been furthered extended and developed in works of more contemporary studies such as Phinney (1989, 1992). In his work, Phinney (1989, 1992) suggests three stages of ethnic identity development; an initial stage where there has been no search of one’s ethnic identity (diffusion/foreclosure), a moratorium stage where there is some evidence of exploration of one’s ethnic identity, and an achieved ethnic identity where one has explored and accepted their ethnicity. Phinney (1989, 1992) suggests that preadolescent minorities tend to adopt or *embrace* cultural, religious, or ethnic values and attitudes that they have been exposed to with little thought of questioning those values and attitudes. As a result, as Ontai-Grzebik and Raffaelli (2004) explain, these individuals may engage in rituals and practices pertaining to their adopted culture without actually understanding the significance of the ritual or practice. One such example can be participating in Easter Day festivities, while many immigrant youth may not understand the purpose or entirety of the celebration, they will still participate with their peers.

Another aspect within Phinney's (1989, 1992) identity model occurs with the advancement of their cognitive abilities, as adolescents start to question the significance of these activities, and will actively explore their own ethnic identity. By the time adolescents reach early adulthood, they are able to arrive at a stage where they accept and internalize all aspects of their ethnicity. There exists empirical evidence for the support of Phinney's three stages of ethnic identity development particularly for ethnic Asian, African and Latino Americans (Ontai-Grzebik & Raffaelli, 2004; Phinney, 1989, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz 1997).

Berry's (1980, 1997) acculturation theory provides four strategies which can be employed by immigrants in a new host country. According to Berry's (1980, 1997) model, there are two key goals in adapting to a new ethnic identity, conserving ones' own cultural identity or adapting to the host country. As such, the four distinct acculturation strategies are; assimilation (where individuals value interaction with their new host country more than their own ethnic culture), separation (highly valuing ones' own culture and avoiding interaction with the host culture), integration (maintaining ones' own culture while at the same time interacting with the host culture), and marginalization (distancing oneself from both the host and ethnic culture).

Personal and Social Identity

Social identity theorists, including Tajfel and Turner (1986), state that one's identity is the combination of their personal identity and social identity. The former, personal identity is the way in which one see's oneself in relation to others. Coinciding with that is social identity, which refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's self-concept is made based on his/her participation and membership within

certain groups. According to Malhi, Boon, and Rogers (2009) “social identity can be comprised of several overlapping and synchronous components including gender, roles, and ethnic, religious, and national identities” (p. 256). Social identity, an individuals’ sense of belonging to a host group, is not fixed (McNamara, 1997; Morita, 2004; Norton, 1997; Schmenk, 2004; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002), rather it is an identity that changes depending on the individuals’ social context or setting (Marx, 2002; McNamara, 1997; Morita, 2004; Norton, 1997). As a result, depending on the situation and context, the individual must adjust or negotiate their identity (Skilton-Sylvester). For example, at home, I may identify myself as a daughter and sister, while at school I identify more as a student. At home with parents an Afghan may identify herself with being Afghan; however, at school among non-Afghans, an individual may identify with being more Canadian than Afghan. Hence, this process of identity negotiation refers to the movement or navigation between such social groups and their norms and values (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003). Furthermore, the negotiation of identity involves a strong desire to create a positive sense of oneself (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007).

Ethnic Identity as Part of Overall Identity

Ethnic identity, according to Phinney and Rotheram (1986), refers to “one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership” (p. 13). One’s sense of ethnic identity is an integral part of their overall identity (Malhi, et al., 2009). Furthermore, According to Phinney (1990) an individual’s ethnic identity entails various different aspects ranging from their sense of belonging towards an ethnic group, what they know about the ethnic group, as well as the culture and rituals that an individual is required to practice within

that group. According to Taylor, Bougie and Caouette (2003) and Malhi, et al., (2009), because the characteristics of one ethnic group (such as practices, language, and other traditions) can be so overwhelming towards their overall identity, these characteristics offer the ideal background on which “the personal identity of the ethnic individual is articulated” (Malhi, et al., 2009, p. 256). Moreover, a research study conducted by Hyers (2001) found positive correlations between ethnic identity, self-perceptions and self-worth, and psychological wellness. It is important to stress again that a person’s identification with his/her ethnicity can vary according to the given context or situation (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985). It is important to consider the identity negotiation and development of Afghan youth in order to investigate the correlations between ethnic identity and psychological wellness. This study will aim to investigate this important issue within the contexts of home, school, and community. For example, this study will look into the ethos of the classroom: How does a student’s sense of self fare in terms of identity when and if teachers and peers are being discriminatory? It is of value to consider whether students develop survival strategies or internalize the oppression.

Feminist Theory

In addition to youth development theories, this study also employs feminist research which reveals sexist practices and the lack of acknowledgement towards these practices by the government and community practices. The goal of feminist research is “documenting women’s lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women’s subjugated knowledge, feminist research challenges the basic structures and ideologies that oppress women” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). Feminist research investigates the social conditions of females in a

society that is sexist, male dominated, and patriarchal (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 12). Furthermore, the goal of feminist research is to empower and emancipate women and other marginalized groups. Findings and results of feminist research is applied to services that promote and encourage social change. Findings also enable social justice for women (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Feminist researchers in their research theory and practice share similar principles and standards such as;

women have been marginalized, male superiority is perpetuated despite policies; assurances and political promises; males and females are considered physically and emotionally different with men being considered superior; there is still a long way to go to establish gender equality; the relationship between researcher and researched requires serious reconsiderations (Sarantakos, 2004, p. 60).

From a feminist standpoint, my own identity as a female Afghan is important as women are the most appropriate researchers when dealing with feminist issues. According to Stanley and Wise (2004) “only women can truly understand women and their unique position” (as cited in Sarantakos, p. 67).

Where Feminism and Critical Race Theory Meet

While it is argued that only women can understand the experiences of other women, it is also important to note that this statement can be further classified. It is inaccurate to ignore the diversities among women. Earlier feminist research honed in on experiences of White, middle to upper class women; neglecting the experiences of coloured and working class women (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminists, such as Peggy McIntosh (1995), prompted White feminists to acknowledge White privilege as a

form of oppression against racialized and minority women. It is important to acknowledge the voices and experiences of women of colour and poor women to obtain a more accurate understanding of the social realities of all women, regardless of race and class (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). It is further important to look into the history and experiences of a racialized or marginalized woman because, as Mogadime (2004) states, this group [marginalized women] is “never properly represented, never allowed to speak for itself, but always authoritatively spoken for and to” (p. 16). Therefore, it is important to be able to speak up for a group that is otherwise silenced. Considering the lack of literature on Afghan females, this becomes a more significant goal.

Moreover, in a research study conducting Caribbean-Canadian females, Bobb-Smith (2003) found that the survival of marginalized women is reflected in their own creativity, “out of diverse realities, to produce what they consider best for removing societal pressures which would victimize them as well as their communities” (p. 223). Many of the Caribbean-Canadian women in her study “exercised self-reliance when they moved beyond boundaries established for women in the patriarchal sense” (p. 223). This is one of the goals that I hope to explore in my case study approach to researching Afghan females. How do they move beyond and within the various boundaries in their life? While it is important to take a stance that is informed by feminist theory and race, it is also important to consider the issues surrounding critical race theory. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) were first to introduce critical race theory (CRT) to the field of education, and since then, researchers have theorized, examined, and challenged the multiple ways which “race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses” (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, & Lynn, 2004). Critical race theory (CRT)

provides scholars and educators with some of the foundations from which to explore the use of ethnic and minority experiences. It is defined as ‘a body of legal scholarship a majority of whose members are both existentially people of colour and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism’ (Bell, 1995, p. 898).

CRT suggests that racism is a pervasive and systemic condition, not merely an individual pathology. It is a vast system that structures our institutions and our relationships within society. It adapts to sociocultural changes by altering its expression; however, it does not diminish or disappear, it is permanent. CRT specifically calls for recognition of the experiential knowledge of “people of colour”. This knowledge is then explored to make sense of the wider public world and stories are used to counteract and to subvert the reality of the dominant voice (Housee, 2008).

Critical race theory and feminism intersect in what is called critical race feminism (CRF). The purpose of critical race feminism is to conduct research pushed by a social justice agenda. Critical race feminists often select methods that include a political, social, or economic agenda which is aimed at benefitting the group of women under study (Few, 2007). Critical race feminists use nontraditional methods such as life narratives, poetry, and histories for conducting research (Wing, 2000). CRF is described as a theoretical multidisciplinary genre that situates minority and coloured women at the center, rather than within the margins of the experience. CRF recognizes that experiences of coloured women are different than experiences of White women or coloured men (Wing, 1997). Furthermore, similar to CRT, CRF operates on the following premises: “accepts (1) that racism is an ordinary and fundamental part of American society, (2) race as a social construction, (3) storytelling as methodology, (4) multidisciplinary approach to

scholarship, and (5) critical race praxis” (Berry, 2009, p. 747). Furthermore, according to Wing (2003), critical race feminism “constitutes a race intervention in feminist discourse, in that it necessarily embraces feminism’s emphasis on gender oppression within a system of patriarchy” (p. 7).

Issues of Immigration and Multiculturalism in Canada

It is important to consider race in this study because not only are the participants racialized females, but the society within which they live is a multicultural and diverse one. It is necessary to understand the social and cultural contexts in which participants’ lives are situated. According to Joshee (2004), the Canadian identity is a “mosaic of cultures” (p. 132). Joshee accurately defines our diverse identity as an asset to Canada, setting us apart from our ‘melting pot’ American neighbours. The demographic shift in the Canadian population since the 1970s have led to the creation of educational policies intended to address racial and cultural diversity in educational contexts (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996). Successive Canadian policies on cultural diversity have evolved into three major foci; citizenship, identity, and social justice. According to Joshee, these foci coexist in federal policy where multicultural education programs and policies in schools and school districts, also attend to immigrant issues, cultural awareness and antiracism. This was essential following 1971 when multiculturalism became an official federal government policy. It is questionable to what extent changes have effectively occurred since 1971 (Joshee).

Issues of Ethnicity and Culture for Minority Identity Development

Related to ethnicity is the concept of culture. Just as one’s identity undergoes continuous changes, culture too changes. It is not static. Ishii-Jordon (1997) argues that

“the more experiences an individual has, the more his or her own culture changes from that of the initial natal environment” (p. 28). Essentially, culture can vary over time depending on various factors such as geographical location or citizenship. For Afghans, the notion of culture can change over time in the sense that new immigrants may be more attached to their Afghan cultural practices than first or second generation immigrants who have adopted more Western practices.

Romero and Roberts (1998) emphasize a strong distinction between notions of ethnicity and culture. An ethnic group, such as Afghans, can be defined as a group in which its members share a parallel social heritage. Culture, on the other hand, is a more inclusive concept. While ethnic identity is the degree of one’s sense of belonging and attachment to a group, national identity, on the other hand, is a broader construct involving notions of attachment and belonging to, along with attitudes toward the larger society (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, , 2006). According to Khanlou and Crawford (2006), the concept of cultural identity is more inclusive of the diverse identities in which individuals can define themselves. This entails national, ancestral, hyphenated, racial and migrant identities. Thus, according to Khanlou and Crawford (2006)

cultural identity is recognized as a component of the identity of an individual who through living in a multicultural context, where as a member of a major or a minor group, and through daily contact with other cultures, is aware of the cultural component of the self (p. 5).

Such a contextual conception carries the implication that cultural identity manifests itself in the presence of culturally different other(s); (Khanlou, et al., 2008). From the perspective of Afghans, cultural identity would entail that the Afghans, Afghan youth in

particular, would be aware of *who* they are as an Afghan and how to understand their self in relation to other Afghans and other non-Afghans. This process of self-definition and self-esteem are central components of identity development. While the literature argues that consideration of racialized minority youth needs to be inserted into a wider discussion pertaining to identity development, Afghan youth are virtually absent in such discussions. Therefore, this next section highlights the importance of self-definition and self-esteem for the development of minority youth from a generalized perspective. This discussion provides a context for examining Afghan youth in particular.

Implications of Self-Definition and Self-Esteem for Minority Youth

Development

According to Branch (1999), there have been limited studies of racial attitudes among youth (in comparison to studies of younger children); however, they contain some general assumptions thought to be accurate but are without empirical evidence. In one of the first studies on youth attitudes towards race, Rosenberg and Simmons (1971) were concerned with self-esteem issues amongst Black-White youth. This study found that Black participants felt much better about their physical characteristics than their White counterparts. According to Branch, in some ways, this work may have established a precedent for subsequent studies on youth to focus on self-perceptions and appraisals of race and ethnicity. Branch also states that while there are many studies focusing on youth and racial identities, the primary focus is on youth's perceived self-esteem and their physical characteristics. There is very little focus on the emotional and mental issues that are integral with the various attitudes towards race.

Context for a Better Understanding of Afghan Immigration, Youth, and Culture

Acculturation and immigration studies, such as by Phinney et al. (2006), examined populations of immigrant youth across and within different Canadian contexts. Concepts of cultural identity are found near the field of acculturation as a broad concept which is a reference to the different changes that “take place following intercultural contact” (Phinney et al., 2006, p. 71). Furthermore, acculturation plays an active role in how effectively immigrant youth adapt both socioculturally as well as psychologically. Other studies too found that while most youth face the challenges of developmental transitions, immigrant youth may be exposed to further challenges due to their intercultural status (Kilbride, 2000; Phinney et al., 2006).

Khanlou, et al., (2008) conducted a research study on Afghan and Iranian youth in Toronto where Afghan participants discussed how the negative portrayal of their culture and religion (Islam) in the media fueled prejudice about their culture and religion within Western countries. Most importantly, these youth reported that these false representations not only affected how others viewed them as individuals, but it also affected how they viewed themselves (Khanlou, et al., 2008). Participants in the same study discussed the issues of discrimination as having an impact on their cultural identity and adjustment to life in Canada. These youth shared personal experiences of discrimination and prejudice which impacted their expressions of cultural identity.

For many of these youth, such experiences often resulted in their consciously silencing or fearing to disclose their identity...Despite reporting discriminatory experiences, participants of this study also expressed personal strength and

resilience as a coping reaction to their experiences of discrimination (Khanlou, et al., p. 505-506).

Furthermore, this study also found that while “cultural diversity was not a benign or abstract concept for youth, prejudice and discrimination was a powerful and explicit theme that influenced cultural identity” (Khanlou, Lou, & Mill, 2008, p. 507). Cultural identity is shaped by events occurring in their country and/or culture of origin, and how these events are portrayed or responded to in their new host country. This study also found emerging discriminatory experiences attributed to youth’s visible difference at school. Discrimination based on skin, cultural practices, ethnic and cultural identity was reported.

According to Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006), more discrimination is experienced by youth who belong to more highly visible ethnic groups. Furthermore, youth also reported discriminatory experiences in school not only from classmates but also teachers (Khanlou, et al., 2008). A research study on immigrant youth in Ontario found that this may not be surprising as school is one of the first places where youth may encounter discrimination (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). Prejudice and discrimination by classmates was one of the more significant barriers to settlement. Khanlou, et al. (2008) also found that minority youth were very critical of their teachers for a lack of support and imposing assumptions and expectations on youth due to their culture. The same study also calls for the necessity of inclusive policies and practices in order to acknowledge and address cultural identity of youth in various multicultural societies and settings (Khanlou, et al.).

Race and Identity Formation from the 1990s to Present

For some time, researchers have argued for the importance of integrating race into a consideration of identity formation. According to Sheets and Hollins (1999), while ethnic identity may originate, form, and develop in homes, an important part of it still unfolds and is displayed in the community, particularly in schools settings. Sheets and Hollins argue that theoretical frameworks guiding research of identity formation must be developed so that we can understand and examine the construction of ethnic identity and its transition throughout a child's social interactions (with friends, classmates, and teachers). This should be done with and without relational aspects to other groups. Jones (1997) points to the lack of adequate theoretical frameworks that sufficiently "address the relationship between people's perceptions of ethnic identity (their own and others), and the cultural practices and social relations in which they are engaged" (p. 65). An example Sheets and Hollins point to is what would happen to the social and cognitive development of children if and when they decide to preserve ethnic boundaries. If it can be assumed that ethnic identity informs social interactions and behaviours, one must also explore the effects ethnic identity has on an individuals' cognitive and social development if their performance is reconfirmed and validated as "accepted modes of behaviour in schools" (Sheets & Hollins, p. 98).

According to researchers, it is also important to understand that we must be careful "not to elevate observed regularities in ethnic behaviour to the level of causal principles in the conceptualization and explanation of ethnic identity" (Sheets & Hollins, 1999, p. 98). It is, therefore, important to understand the formation and development of ethnic identity of one self and others as it is integral in changing classroom and school

practices. Although there is a lack of research on Afghan youth and their formation and development of identity patterns, it is essential to fill in this gap with research from related groups including Muslim youth belonging to Arab, East Indian, South Asian, and Iranian groups.

Many researchers, including Khanlou, et al.(2008), also discuss the necessity to carefully look at the relationship between cultural identity of youth and the level of integration among other racialized youth. This relationship is vital because it helps to understand the integrating pathways among a particular population considering their higher levels of economic and social disadvantages in comparison to the general Canadian population (Khanlou, et al.; Ornstein, 2006). Galabuzi (2001) states that the extreme disadvantages of racialization can be active in lowering an individual's sense of belonging and their acculturation within a given society. Research on American immigrant populations by Choi (2001) indicates that second and third generation immigrant youth can be at risk of poor social integration, especially if there is a delayed identity establishment. This risk is heightened when their families preserve traditional cultural practices and values.

Youth and Islam

Alongside traditional cultural practices and values, it is important to look at religious identity and affiliations amongst youth as this can be a strong influence on immigrant youths identity development and negotiation process. As my study is on Muslim Afghan youth, it is important to understand what it means to be Muslim, and understanding of the different religious beliefs and practices of Islam are necessary in order to consider the role of Islam in their everyday lives.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with nearly 1.2 billion followers, preceded only by Christianity (Esposito, 1998). The Holy Quran is the “very foundation of unity within Islam” (Gibbs, 2005, p. 158), containing Sunna and Hadiths, or teachings and practices of the Prophet Mohammed. The body of revelation and knowledge (the Quran, Sunna, and Hadiths) is the ultimate source for the institutionalization of Islam (Gibbs, p. 158). Included in the Quran are three fundamental beliefs and five pillars. The three fundamental beliefs are: (a) monotheism or belief in one God; (b) prophet hood or belief in the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and all the past prophets; and (c) Judgment Day. The Five Pillars of Islam start with the belief in one God, Allah and Mohammed as His last and final Prophet (Ali, Liu, Humedian, 2004). The second pillar in Islam is prayer prescribed five times a day, at respective times. The third pillar is the giving of alms, or zakat, done so as to rectify social inequalities (Esposito). Zakat is commonly given at the end of the month of Ramadan. The month of Ramadan is important for all Muslims as it is mainly here that the fourth pillar, fasting, is completed. During this month, Muslims who are physically able must refrain from drinking any liquids, eating, and engaging in any sexual/immoral activities for each day from sunrise to sunset. While Muslims are required to resume their daily activities, they are encouraged to self-reflect and promote their own spiritual discipline. At the end of Ramadan is the celebration of Eid. The fifth pillar is pilgrimage or hajj to the holy city Mecca, to be performed once in a lifetime (Ali, et al.).

The institutionalization of Islam is predominantly manifested in Islamic or Sharia Law, which is “the codification of the way to live in accordance with God’s will, covering a vast array of topics” (Gibbs, p. 158). Sharia Law covers a broad range of

activity from worshipping and morality, to legal issues such as divorce and economic transactions. Sharia Law defines categorically what is mandatory, recommended, indifferent, offensive, and forbidden in Islam. Moreover, it also provides a direction or guidance on how to apply certain principles and obligations in conflicting situations or extenuating circumstances (Gibbs, p. 182). There are two major orthodox groups within Islam, Sunnis and Shi'ites, comprising of 80% and 15% of the total Muslim population, along with several other smaller sects. There exist diverse exegetical interpretations of the Quran and Sunna within these sects, as well as varying philosophical and theological schools of thought, "all of which contribute to diverse political and social attitudes and institutions" (Gibbs, p.158).

It is essential to dismy the erroneous definition of Islamic fundamentalism as "synonymous with terrorism" (White, Little, & Smith, 1997). This term is controversial and inaccurately used, becoming "a psychological scapegoat for those who refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for the real international and intercultural problems" (Tehrani, 2000, p. 217). A more accurate definition of Islamic fundamentalism is the reference to "the growth of Islam as a religious force and a political ideology and...to the desire to reinstate the Islamic legal code" (White, et al., p. 7).

There are numerous other foundational practices and beliefs sacred to Muslims; however, this thesis will only discuss a few relevant to female Afghans. The issue of the dressing, hijab, or headscarf is contentious in Islam. Some Islamic cultures believe that women are to cover completely (burqa), while other cultures believe that the meaning of modesty is open to interpretation and take these verses more liberally and opt for the hijab, which covers solely the head (Esposito, 1998). Relations between men and women

are discouraged prior to marriage. Muslims are expected to marry within their own religion, and most often with Afghans, within their own ethnicity. Divorce is available; however, it is discouraged. Islam does not allow a division between religion and state; it is a total way of life. All state institutions are considered as religious, with the Sharia as their constitution. According to Afghan anthropologist, Dr. Nabi Misdaq (2006), Afghans by any Islamic standard are devout and conservative Muslims.

A research study on young Muslims found that regardless of their religiosity or practicing of Islam, most Muslims tend to self-identify as Muslims (Vertovec & Rodgers, 1998). Otterbeck's (2011) study on "non-devout" Muslims in Europe shared similar findings where first generation Danish and Swedish youth from various Muslim backgrounds expressed little to no interest in Islam and its practices, yet still self-identified as being Muslim. Silvestri (2011) in her study on Muslim women in Europe states that women are often represented in "one-sided portrayals" and are often depicted as "victims" of patriarchal cultural traditions or belonging to an "oppressive backwards" faith (p. 1233). Further, Silvestri (2011) argues that women remain to be understood as "fully rounded beings" or "'agents' of their own lives" (p. 1233). Rather Muslim women in Europe are depicted as "passive dependent variables of far away political and geographical contexts" (p. 1233).

Broad Overview and Positioning of Muslim Females in Canada

More specific to my research investigation on Canadian Muslim females, Zine (2000) found that Muslim students are successfully able to negotiate their religious identities. Furthermore, these students used their identities as a means of "resistance" towards their marginalization in White dominant schools. According to Zine (2001),

Muslim youth encounter three significant conflicting cultural frameworks when negotiating their identities: “the dominant culture, their ethnic culture, and Islam” (p. 404). The same research study examined issues of accommodation and negotiation relating to the Muslim lifestyle and conservative dress, and the resistance strategies young Muslims use towards inclusion. The students in this study reported racism and discrimination in their schooling experiences, particularly those students that wore a hijab. These female students reported interactions with teachers that were often based on negative Orientalist assumptions where teachers maintained assumptions of oppression at homes (by their fathers and brothers) and that as females, their education was unvalued (you can cite Said here). The next section focuses on Afghan females in the Canadian context.

Broad Overview and Positioning of Afghan Canadians

Escaping from years of chaos and destruction, Afghan refugees started to immigrate to Canada in significant numbers, starting in the late 1980s (Norquay, 2004). For many Afghan refugees, Toronto, Ontario was an ideal place to settle as it is one of the most diverse communities in the world (Galloway, 2003). Practically half of all immigrants settle in Ontario, and the majority of these chose the Greater Toronto Area (Galloway). As pointed out in a previous section, data from the 2006 (most recent as of June 2010) Canadian Census indicated that there are 48, 090 (23, 835 females) Afghan Canadians living in Canada, with 31, 295 (15, 485 females) currently living in Ontario, 23, 230 (11, 615) of whom live in Toronto, 1, 690 in Blue Lake (790 females), and 200 (95 females) in Valley Hills (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Demographically, the majority of Afghan Canadians are new immigrants (77.4%), while a small percentage constitutes first

generation immigrant youth (19.4%), and the remaining 3.1% are nonpermanent residents (Norquay). The Afghan community plays an important role in the development and maintenance of Afghan values and identity. According to Kuusisto (2007), the social network of the community, especially a religious minority community, plays a significant role in the socialization process of youth. Therefore, it is important to look at the context of the Afghan community in Southern Ontario to determine any effects it can have on Afghan youth identity development.

Broad Overview and Positioning of Afghans in Educational Contexts

In terms of education, a statistical document entitled *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile* (Ornstein, 2006) revealed that 39.4% of Afghans between the ages of 25 and 34 have not completed high school, only 29.8% are high school graduates, 3.2% have graduated from a trade, and 10.4% from college. Only 5.4% have some university, 10.3% have a university degree, and 1.5% have a Masters or PhD. For Afghans between the ages of 18 and 24, this study revealed that 18.4% of Afghans are not in school full time and have not completed high school. These statistics are especially alarming when considering how poorly Afghans do, with respect to academic advancement, in comparison to overall ethno-racial groups in Toronto. In comparison to the overall 713, 440 minorities in Toronto where 18% are not high school graduates, 21.7% are high school graduates, 7.0% are in a trade, 18.9% have a college diploma, 2.9% have some university, 25.4% have graduated university, and 6.1% have Masters or PhD's (Ornstein). According to Ornstein, while these figures potentially reflect the displacement of the Afghan refugees by war, such figures can also indicate difficulties young people experience in Canadian schools. This same research

indicates that Afghans aged 35-54 have slightly more education than their younger cohorts; this also suggests potential difficulties in the educational system for younger Afghans (Ornstein, p. 51). Arguably, it is safe to assume that the older age group fared better in high school presumably in Afghanistan. This draws attention to the possibility that Afghan youth are struggling in the Canadian education system. These figures are problematic as, in comparison to the 113 ethnic groups studied, Afghans, along with a few other groups (Iraqi's, Sri Lankan and Tamil's, Eritreans, Vietnamese, etc.) have the lowest educational attainment (Ornstein). More shocking is the existence of "extreme poverty" in over half of the Afghan Canadian population (Ornstein, p. 80).

As Khanlou et al. (2008) state, the majority of research on immigrant youth and identity is predominantly conducted in the United States. One of the risks involved in utilizing American research point towards adopting generalizations of youth experiences in the Canadian context even though the two nations have distinct social and immigration policies.

Chapter Two provided an overview of the theoretical frameworks within which this research study will be investigated; feminist theory, critical race theory, and various theories on youth identity. This chapter also provided a deeper understanding of issues pertaining to ethnicity and culture in the minority identity development process. Critiques of conventional identity development in relation to racialized minority youth were also outlined. Finally, this chapter reviewed the literature on the experiences of Canadian Muslim females, Afghan Canadians, and Afghans in Canadian educational contexts.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The current chapter addresses the methodological framework used in my study. This section will introduce a section to qualitative research and case study research design before getting into specific information on the data collection process, participants, site, the interview process, ethical considerations, data analysis, analytic memos, reflexivity, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, this section will include a section on self-reflexivity within the research process. This final section is necessary because as an Afghan female employing feminist research methodology to research and interviewing other Afghan females, I need to identify my own position within the research study.

Within the framework of critical race theory (CRT) and feminist methodologies, this qualitative research seeks to answer questions through an examination of the various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. These theories are employed because the female population that I am interested in requires a gendered understanding to analyze data and insert feminist voices into the discussion within the broader discussion of gender and race identity. Through interviews with 6 female Afghan participants, I can legitimate unheard and marginalized voices. As qualitative research is interested in how humans arrange themselves, and makes sense of their surroundings, it is pertinent to my study so that I may find out how Afghan females arrange themselves and make sense of their surroundings. Furthermore, feminist methodology enables researchers to draw on their own experiences and beliefs during the process of “co-construction” (DeVault, 1990). This following chapter will explore the process of feminist qualitative research further.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods look at the why and how of decision making through gathering information from areas such as; participant observations, field notes, reflexive journals, structured interviews, semistructured interviews, and analyzing documents and materials (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). There are also various approaches in carrying out qualitative research, including; ethnographic, critical social research, ethical inquiry, grounded theory, and phenomenology. A case study is a research method investigating an individual, a group, or an event. The following study is based on a qualitative case study that explores how a particular group (female Afghan Canadians) develops and negotiates their identities across various realms.

Case Study

Qualitative research is helpful in gaining detail and in-depth understanding of any experiences about which little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A descriptive case study was to collect data from 6 first generation young Afghan females in Southern Ontario. I followed the descriptive case study design suggested by Creswell (2007) “[the] investigator explores multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 73). Case studies investigate phenomena within the “real-life context” where the “boundaries between phenomenon and context” are unclear (Yin, 2008, p. 18). Since my study is about Afghan female experiences, I also employed descriptive case studies wherein I provide a detailed analysis or overview of their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

In general, each of the participants has unique and valuable knowledge and experiences. Once their knowledge is recognized, valued, and used, individuals feel their

views are significant and can help others understand their thinking, actions, and reactions (Ricoeur, 1990). Considering the dearth of research on young Afghan females, the experiences and knowledge that the participants will share will be integral in creating a new space for Afghan females in Canadian research literature. For participants, they too may feel a sense of achievement in that they have contributed to the lack of research on Afghan females. Their voices and experiences will be amongst the first in Canadian research literature to be heard, analyzed, and documented. Most importantly, participants will feel validated that their experiences and narratives are being valued and respected.

Data Collection

This study will provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of first generation young Afghan females in southern Ontario in their quest towards negotiating their ethnic identity in a western society. This understanding was developed over one round of interviews with each participant. Each interview was 30-45 minutes long and followed a semistructured interview process. The overall research question that guided the study is: How do young Afghan females negotiate and formulate their identities across the contexts of home, school, and community? Other questions explored are: (a) How does first generation young Afghan females' home-life contribute to their sense of identity? (b) Do peers and teachers influence their emerging sense of identity? (c) Specifically, are there any differences across the three different school types (Catholic, public, and Islamic)? (d) How does religion shape and/or influence the identity negotiation process? (e) What role does the greater Afghan Community play in their identity negotiation process? (see Appendix A for complete list of interview questions). Since qualitative research requires an in-depth understanding, it usually entails working

with small samples of participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). It is more important to not generalize, but rather to understand, processes or ‘meanings’ participants attribute to their social situations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy).

Through interviews, observations, and the review of documents (e.g., diaries, oral histories, letters) data collection can be achieved. Over the last 2 decades, qualitative researchers have established interviewing as a common method for data collection (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Semistructured interviews were conducted with specific interview questions (Appendix A), and while the researcher was not concerned with the order of the questions, it was important to cover them all in the interview (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). This research study is based on 6 interviews for its primary method of data collection. Once the interviews were conducted, triangulation was ensured in using multiple sources of data including interviews, a researcher journal, and member checking. The consistency of research findings can be ensured through the triangulation of different data sources, and the use of multiple theories in data interpretation (Patton, 2002). As a researcher, I collected data from interviews and interacted with the participants in interpreting their views regarding the outlined research questions and areas (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

As previously mentioned, Holloway and Wheeler (2010) stress the significance of document analysis in providing a historical and formal view of system requirements. Details about the researchers’ own knowledge and understanding of the topic will be discussed and will also be incorporated where necessary throughout the subsequent chapters. In addition, construction of meanings in the context of a particular interview,

and inclusion of any empirical literature that might have shaped the results in the study will be provided if necessary.

Participants

For participant selection, I employed purposive sampling which is selecting participants based on consideration of the research question and available resources (Hesse-Biber, 2007). The participants were selected based on specific characteristics (Patton, 2002) such as age, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. I selected participants who are representative cases from the different schools in Southern Ontario, and explored different experiences of these participants (Yin, 2003). Essentially, participants must be first generation Afghan females, between the ages of 14-18, and must attend either a public, Catholic, or Islamic school. Aside from advertisements in the Afghan Association of Ontario community center, participants were also recruited through snowball sampling. I contacted (via email and Facebook) my family and friends with information on my study and asked them to forward the information to any female Afghans who fit the criteria listed above. This process (also known as chain referral sampling) enabled me to recruit participants through various social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. This effect helped me to recruit Afghans from areas which were not served by the Afghan Association of Ontario, areas such as Blue Lake and Valley Hills.

As participants were under the age of 18, I provided parental consent and minor assent forms to all participants who were interested in the study. The first 2 participants who returned the parental consent forms and represented the three school types (Islamic, Catholic, and public schools) were selected for the study. A potential drawback to this

approach was that interested participants who contacted me later (through word of mouth and social networking) were not selected. Some of these participants may have shared richer or more diverse experiences.

Site

The site in which the data were collected is Southern Ontario, which according to 2006 Statistics Canada estimates, includes 12.1 million people, roughly 92% of Ontario's total population of 13.1 million people. Southern Ontario is home to Canada's largest city, Toronto (population 5.1 million), Hamilton (population 692, 900) and St. Catharines-Niagara (390, 300; Statistics Canada, 2006a). Southern Ontario was initially colonized by the French and British; however, many immigrants from Asian countries and other parts of the world have arrived in great numbers since the mid-20th century. And as a result, Southern Ontario (in particular the Greater Toronto Area) has amongst the highest concentration of immigrants worldwide (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Overall, Ontario has the highest proportion of people born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, Immigration to Ontario, 2001). Research participants were recruited from the Greater Toronto Area, Blue Lake, and Valley Hills.

Interviews

The impetus to use interviews as a methodological approach for this thesis corroborates with Reinharz's (1992) beliefs that interviewing is an essential access point to learning about women's "hidden knowledge." Reinharz ascertains that interviews offer feminist researchers access as follows:

[To womens'] ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of

women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women, (, p. 19).

Patton (2002) argues the importance of maintaining the perspective that the experiences of participants are important. To ensure that information within the same area is being explored consistently from all potential participants, interview questions (Appendix A) were used for all 6 participants. This guide ensured that as a researcher I obtained consistent and rich data within a shorter period of time from all participants (Kvale, 1996). I interviewed the participants using feminist methodology techniques which attempts to “break down the one-way hierarchical framework of traditional interviewing techniques,” I managed to do so by ensuring that interviews were “engaged, interactive, and open-minded” (Bloom, 1998, p. 17). Semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A) allowed for free interaction with participants, including opportunities for discussion and deeper exploration (Reinharz). Interview questions ensured that the interviews fall within a 30-45 minute timeline. The length of this time line ensured that enough time would be allotted for the questions. A semistructured interviewing method was used and the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. As previously mentioned, interview questions were focused on issues surrounding school life, home life, and interactions within the Afghan community.

According to Reinharz (1992), key feminist research methodology constitutes elements such as “studying unplanned personal experience”, where my own experiences in developing and negotiating my identity as an Afghan female support my interest in this research. Reinharz also recommends identifying rather than keeping my distance from participants, where as an Afghan woman, I should openly and freely identify with the

female Afghan participants, thus, encouraging them to feel more comfortable and identify with me. Furthermore, Reinharz recommends “structured conceptualization” whereby I record, analyze, and make meaning of information participants share in attempts to comprehend concepts and issues of significance to them. This information is captured through tape recorders or lengthy response questionnaires. A digital audio recorder captured participant responses to the open-ended interview questions. Lastly, Reinharz recommends photographs, although I did not take photographs of participants, diaries and memos record body language, gestures, and posture of participants throughout the interviews.

Throughout the interviews and communication leading up to the interviews, I encouraged participants to speak freely and be comfortable in expressing their thoughts, concerns, and experiences. Free expression is significant when conducting feminist research as females are socialized to express their feelings and opinions; this process allowed me to build connections with the participants on their everyday experiences of issues such as identity, racism, and sexism across various contexts of home, school, and community.

From a feminist researcher perspective, the use of in-depth interviews is excellent in encouraging subjectivity and intensive dialogue between two groups; this is considered an integral aspect of feminist analysis of gender experiences (Reinharz, 1992). Therefore, interviews are a means of contemporary “storytelling,” whereby participants are comfortably able to share life experiences in response to interview questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 647). In order to get participants to be able to open up to me and feel comfortable in sharing their experiences with me, prior to starting the interview process,

it was important to establish a rapport by creating a comfortable, conversational tone for the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I established a rapport with participants through making casual conversation prior to beginning the formal interview. As a young, Afghan female, it was easy to establish this rapport.

Tensions in Research Methods

However, I walk a delicate and fine balance because it is critical to remember the key to successful interviewing is to “be friendly but not too friendly” (Oakley, 1980, p. 34). The importance of establishing an equal balance of rapport is in its direct impact on how open participants will be and, as a result, the quantity (and quality) of the data collected (Phoenix, 2001). It is important to note that while feminist research is concerned with a reduction of the hierarchy between researchers and participants, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) argue that there is growing concern within feminist scholars that the researchers and participants are *not* at the same level, yet so many consider the interview process as a “co-construction” of meaning (p. 19). Rather, the “participatory model” is used which suggests that the researcher shares her own brief biography with the participants (Oakley, 1980; Reinharz, 1992). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy this process of sharing researcher identity and biography, allows the researcher to build a rapport and increase openness and comfort throughout the interview process. Most importantly, this process of sharing identities and stories also breaks down any perceived notion of hierarchy, power or authority of the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy).

The level of comfort and trust is important to establish with participants. In his study with Muslim youth on their religiosity, Otterbeck (2011) explained that in his interviews, the young adults gave normative responses to interview questions, “probably

feeling that they, in the interview represented Muslims and should render Islamic rituals correctly” (p. 1177). Otterbeck avoided normative discourse through gaining the trust of the participants and by taking an interest in them as individuals. This is important in the context of my study as my research interests are in the everyday experiences of participants. I did not want normative responses that did not speak to participants’ everyday experiences, nor did I want responses based on my position as a female, Afghan researcher investigating. I avoided “normative responses” by gaining the trust of my participants, as well as establishing my own reflexivity as an “insider” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) who is already familiar with some of the tensions they may be experiencing. I also reminded participants of the importance of expressing their voices given the lack of Canadian literature on Afghan women. This encouraged participants to be truthful and honest about their everyday experiences, without feeling uncomfortable.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. Following clearance from the Research Ethics Board (Appendix B), participants were recruited through advertisements in the Afghan Association of Ontario and community centers, as well as using the snowball effect. I placed posters in the regional offices of the Afghan Association of Ontario and in the lobby of the Afghan Community center. Posters included my contact information, email address, and cell phone number should participants seek more information. Also included in the posters was a brief description of my study, Brocks Research Ethic Board clearance number, and contact information for my advisor. The snowball effect, recruiting participants through word of mouth within the Southern Ontario Afghan community, assisted in recruiting participants who were not regular members or strongly

affiliated with the Afghan Association of Ontario. Once interested participants contacted me, I provided them with parental consent and minor assent forms which were signed and returned to me. Parental consent and minor assent from all participants was necessary following an explanation of the nature of my research question. Consent and assent forms reiterated the fact that participation was voluntary and that I would be using pseudonyms for participants; this allowed the participants to realize that they were able to ask questions or even feel free to not answer any questions which they may not feel comfortable with (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

I also provided participants with a copy of the interview questions beforehand (Appendix A) so that they would be prepared for our discussion, and envision what our conversation would be like. This was important to do because it allowed participants to mentally be prepared for their interview. This also allowed participants to be comfortable throughout the interview process because they knew where our conversation was headed, and what sort of questions would be asked next. It also allowed participants to touch on the different areas which were included in the questions. Some of the drawbacks of providing participants with the questions beforehand included obtaining “rehearsed” responses. However, it was important that the participants be prepared and be given enough time to be comfortable and provide honest and data rich responses.

The first 2 participants to return the forms and who represented each of the diverse schooling experiences (Islamic, Catholic, and public schools) were selected for the study. Participant interviews took place at locations chosen by the participant. Participants selected locations of comfort such as coffee shops, public libraries, community centers, and participant homes. Member checking of the transcripts was also

conducted. In this process, a transcript was presented to the participant requesting a check on the quality and accuracy. Confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms that the participants selected for themselves. My Letter of Introduction reiterated the notion of confidentiality, as well as the purpose of the study. Throughout the data collection phase, transcribed interviews were labeled with their respective pseudonyms. Upon completion of the research, all transcripts and field notes with any identifying information were destroyed. Transcripts were only shared with participants for member checking and accuracy.

As I interviewed the participants in person, anonymity cannot be guaranteed, however, all measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. I used the assigned pseudonyms in reporting the result of the study. Where necessary, participants' direct quotations were scrutinized to ensure that the participant's identity remains confidential. As participants are under the age of 19 (aged 14-18), permission from parents/guardians was requested prior to conducting any interviews. Permission from parents/guardians was requested through their signature on a Parental Consent and Minor Assent forms which also included an overview of the study. Both parents and participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions (Appendix A) so that they would be aware of the type of questions that would arise in the interview. This allowed participants to withdraw in case they felt uncomfortable with the nature of the questions

Qualitative Data Analysis

Once interviews were complete, the tapes were transcribed. The tapes were replayed to ensure accuracy in the transcripts. This process allowed me to become more familiar with participants' experiences. Additionally, this process enabled me to

disentangle the various themes previously highlighted in the literature review. Within the process of data analysis, I took on the position of an active learner. Researchers stress the importance of developing a familiarity with the data during this process (Creswell, 1998).

Once I had established familiarity with the data, I classified them into a manageable scheme or coding, which is identified as the first step in data analysis (Patton, 2002). Through the use of open coding, I effectively labeled and summarized data into meaningful categories (Patton) prior to examining the data for differences and similarities. The transcripts were treated as a single body of data, and subsequently analyzed for patterns throughout the 6 transcripts. Once I coded the data into categories and subcategories, I simultaneously named each category. Creativity and imagination is integral in making comparisons and acknowledging between the various categories. I coded the interview transcriptions using various types of coding mechanisms such as; open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The significance of open coding is that it allows researchers to explore data in detail through identifying and conceptualizing them. The use of axial coding assisted in making connections between different categories while including situations and phenomena that reveal the relationships between different statements. The use of selective coding was used in order to confirm any relationships between the various categories and subcategories (Patton). This process was essential in identifying significant units of information. I maintained a feminist outlook while coding as I looked for codes and themes which would complement the literature which I had been reading, along with my codes that may reflect my own reflexivity, and codes that would correlate with my notes and memos that I took during the interview process.

Use of Analytic Memos

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) state that just as important as data collection is the role of analytical memos; both can inform and support one another. Memos help to keep track of thoughts and ideas which occur throughout field work or during interviews. Memos encourage researchers to become more reflexive about their own position and relationship with the research. Memos also help with understanding participant experiences during the analysing process (Glesne, 1999). These memos assist in connecting the different categories that arise from the interviews, and also note different theoretical reflections. It is important to consider the fact that analysis of the data (including transcripts, official documents, field notes, etc.) will require more than a description and thematic development of the data; rather, the main foci of the analysis is to make sense of participant experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Reflexivity

Feminist reflexive research starts with an understanding of the researcher's own attitudes and beliefs with respect to the research study. This process must occur before the researcher steps into the field (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Reflexivity is understood as the researcher's own positioning in relation to the world she is researching (Gray, 2008). Furthermore, reflexivity is a "deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself" (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). Researchers must be able to understand how their own experiences and assumptions can intervene in the research process. According to Mann & Kelly (1997), the ability to practice reflexivity entails and acknowledgement of "all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced and that it is

grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed” (Mann & Kelley, 1997, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 392).

Reflexivity is used in qualitative research as a measure for legitimacy and validity (Pillow, 2003). Tools such as listening and writing with reflexivity allow the researcher to situate herself and become aware of how her personal experiences can affect the research process and can produce reliable and legitimate research (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Ball, 1990).

In this case, being cognizant and engaging with reflexivity of my own experiences as an Afghan female is important. During the process of data analysis, researchers are able to reflect on the ways in which they create the assumptive framework within which they convey their understandings of the data (Berg & Smith, 1985). That is, researchers are able to critique their own biases in interpretation of the data. Moreover, reflexivity can be considered as a process where researchers become aware of the impact of the research process on the participants (Calhoun, 2002).

Therefore, according to Patton (2002), researchers need to be dutiful, considerate, and vigilant to the diverse intellectual, political, communal, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own position as well as that of the participants, and those to whom the researcher is reporting. Tilley (1998) discusses the possibilities of conducting respectful research while at the same time, positioning oneself as a researcher; thus, as an Afghan female, I identify myself as “someone familiar” within the scope of the research project as I belong to the same ethnic and religious group as the participants (Afghan Muslims). While I do not belong to the same subtribe or region as all my participants, this was not an issue as our overall identity as Afghans was the main focus of our interviews. Our

linguistic and ethnic differences were not brought up or mentioned as significant by myself or participants.

As an Afghan belonging to the same ethnic and religious group as the participants, it was easier for me to conduct interviews. I did not have to worry about racial and ethnic concerns Tilley raises in questioning “whether a privileged, White, middle-class, heterosexual female could conduct respectful research with incarcerated women” (p. 317). Race and socioeconomic status, according to Tilley, play a significant role in researcher-participant relationships (1998). Being from roughly the same ethno-racial (Afghan, Pashtun) and socio-economic background as participants, this was not a significant issue for the participants and me. Rather, because we were from the same broad affinity groups (Afghan, Muslim, female) it allowed me to develop a stronger rapport and trust with participants as they felt comfortable telling me about their experiences of everyday life, knowing that there was a possibility that I would have the same experiences.

I made all efforts to avoid this becoming a self-fulfilling process by focusing only on participant voices, and developing my analysis surrounding their experiences. I ensured that my personal subjectivities and experiences did not interfere with participants’ experiences and understandings. While this was a difficult process, it was necessary to ensure participants were forthcoming and comfortable, and that my analysis was unbiased. As a researcher, it was important to maintain a respectful and considerate awareness of my own personal biases that I may bring to the study.

I maintained this awareness when conducting my interviews, adding memos, and writing journal entries. A journal was kept throughout the research study to keep track of

any thoughts and observations. A journal is particularly important for triangulation purposes where I need to ensure the credibility and dependability of the study, and as a main research tool will need to reflect on my role, position, and experiences as a researcher during the study (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Such an active role is an important tool to ensure better communication and understanding of inquiry as suggested by Patton (2002). Throughout the interviews, I employed the use of a journal with wide margins on the left-hand side in order to highlight particular events of interest or concern. A journal was also essential in reminding me to investigate an issue or event in more depth as soon as possible (Berg, 2000).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the degree to which one can support and believe in the research findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, a researcher needs to create temporary categories or sections that relate to one another (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it is necessary for researchers to devise rules that describe category properties and that can be used to justify the inclusion of each data bit that remains assigned to the category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability (p. 347).

It is important to use credibility, confirmability (neutrality), dependability, and transferability, which are necessary criteria defining quality research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Detailed and accurate reports and documents of the data analysis and research findings further add to the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Patton, 2002). For this research study, I ensured that my analysis and interpretations of data are trustworthy by reflecting on personal subjectivity in my observations by listening, and by engaging in reflexivity (Holloway & Jefferson, 1997). I made attempts to ensure this by

making certain that my own biases as an Afghan or a Muslim did not interfere with my analysis and reflections. Consideration of the research process as a whole was made, and attempts were made to ensure a responsive sense of awareness of personal knowledge of the topic. I am well aware of the personal biases I hold as an Afghan female; I have tried to ensure that these biases do not interfere with how I engaged with participants in conversation or interpret their voices. I attempted to do so by taking these following steps; (a) member checking, (b) trustworthiness, (c) balancing out any power inequities between myself and participants, (d) using verbatim reflections.

However, as a novice feminist researcher, I walk a delicate and fine balance that is quite typical and acknowledge that this may be a struggle, as Etter-Lewis (1993) points out,

...it is humanly impossible for an interviewer or any other researcher to be totally objective and entirely removed from the narrative process, just as it is for narrators to be absolutely candid about all of the details of their personal lives. (p. xiii)

Despite the steps I have taken, it is important to realize that there may be a certain degree of subjectivity in the research process.

Credibility

Credibility is determining whether or not the research findings are representative of an overall “credible” theoretical interpretation of the data as derived from original participant data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers can also use dependability to ensure the evolving conditions of the phenomenon under investigation. Lincoln and Guba state that the general research question addressed by the notion of trustworthiness is

simply, “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (p. 290). It is important for qualitative researchers to develop a shared understanding of the appropriate procedures for the assessment of the trustworthiness or credibility of findings. This is in reference to the truth or ability to believe the findings that the researchers have recognized (Morse, 1994).

Morse (1994) also states that qualitative research entails the development of a shared understanding of appropriate procedures for the assessment of its credibility or trustworthiness in reference to the truth or ability to believe the findings recognized by researchers. The process of member checking was done once the interviews are transcribed and coded. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), this process also enables researchers to balance out any power inequities between themselves and participants. Feminist scholars urge researchers to engage in this process of giving back their findings or interpretations to their participants in order to get their input or even resolve potential disagreements or misunderstandings between the researcher and the participant (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). It is important to note that the credibility and validity of the research can be strengthened through the use of participants’ verbatim reflections (Patton, 2002). I can also use verbatim reflections of participants in my Chapter Four, where I discuss findings.

Transferability

Transferability occurs where results of an inquiry or research study can be transferred beyond the aims of the project. For example, although this research is directly aimed at Muslim Afghan females, findings can be transferred to Muslim females in

general or Afghan youth in general. Transferability involves the collection of sufficient data to ensure that external findings and implications can be made about the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As a suggestion, researchers recommend using thick descriptions as an important aspect for the transferability of a qualitative study. Data transferability is a practical question which the researcher alone cannot answer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important to compare the context of interest to the research context in order to identify potential similarities. Thus, the degree of transferability is dependent upon the similarities found between the two contexts.

Dependability

Harrison, MacGibbon, and Morton (2001) stress the significance of member checking in ensuring data trustworthiness and dependability. Furthermore, I describe in detail the full steps and measures taken during the data analysis process to ensure dependability of the research findings. The use of detailed notes and memos on choices and decisions made throughout the process add to the research dependability, member check process, and, therefore, overall reliability (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, 2010). While the procedure for participant selection and interviewing process has been included and clearly presented to ensure that results are dependable (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), because this is a case study, the results may differ depending on the youth interviewed and their own unique experiences.

Confirmability

How well an inquiry's results can be supported by the data collected is a reference to the confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To reinforce thematic confirmability, verbatim quotations are incorporated in the study findings

(Wuest, Stern & Irwin, 2001). Study findings are also supported by literature and previous studies to confirm the interpretations and strengthen the results of the research study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Because there is a lack of research on Afghan Canadian females, the extent to which confirmability can be ensured is limited. However, confirmability can still be applied to broader research on Muslim females or Afghan youth in general. To make further sense of the emerging themes and their interpretations, details about the researcher and background feelings of the researcher will be reflected on. To provide an accurate document trail, the various methods in this study are described in detail as concisely as possible. All the steps employed in this study are clearly stated and employed with meticulous attention to detail.

Self-Reflexivity in the Research Process

This qualitative case study is based in my interests in the Afghan Canadian youth Diaspora. My interest in this Diaspora stems from my own experiences of living in and growing up Canadian. Although I have spent over 2 decades living in Canada, I consider myself to be Afghan first and Canadian second. Although I am grateful to the advantages that my Canadian passport has granted me the last 23 years, I still have Afghan characteristics that no amount of time can ever take away. Growing up as a visible minority for most of my life, I have both negative and positive associations with my identity. From Junior Kindergarten to Grade 5, I spent my childhood in Toronto, unaware of the differences that my skin tone and religion would cause. When my parents moved to Thorold during Grade 6, I experienced a sudden culture shock where I immediately became a “token” minority. As the only visible minority in class, I had a difficult time making friends and trying to fit in with my classmates. My teachers at the time were

unable to help me. They would often single me out in class or put me on the spot when I would not participate. They could not pronounce my name, nor would they stop asking me where and how I learned English.

I managed to maintain good marks, and eventually started to make friends. At home, it was a different atmosphere. I was a typical, traditional Afghan girl. I helped my mom with chores and looked after my younger siblings. I did not have a social life. My parents, fearful of the level of influence my friends could potentially have over me, discouraged me from developing friendships outside of school. As a result, my siblings and I relied on one another for companionship.

When I got to high school, I was allowed to go out with my friends, but I had an early curfew. By this time, I had made some friends and became a social butterfly. I was no longer the “token” minority. I was no longer an “Other” amongst my peers. When I was in Grade 11, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 happened, and everything changed. I suddenly became an enemy to some of my friends, and others would not stop asking me ignorant questions about my family and religion. The disappointment of being different in middle school returned, yet now I was not only a minority but also apparently “a terrorist.” I became the butt of all terrorist and Islamic jokes, even to some of my teachers. While I did not tell my parents, instead I used my sense of humour as a coping mechanism.

Although my middle and high school years were difficult to go through, I excelled academically and socially. Academically, I succeeded in being on the Principal’s Honour roll every year in middle school and high school. In high school, I became involved in various leadership committees such as the Model U.N. debate team and Student Council.

I earned an entrance scholarship to Brock University, along with several awards and scholarships upon graduation. Socially, I struggled with friendships, especially in Grade 11 after 9/11.

However, through my sense of humour I avoided dignifying the racist and discriminatory comments. I did not internalize the hate which was directed towards me. I did not give my peers the opportunity to damage my pride or identity as a Muslim and Afghan. I should clarify that this was a struggle, and not a simple process. Initially, it was difficult emotionally; however, I knew that I had to be able to get beyond it. Alongside my humour, I used kindness towards my peers, and over the next 2 years, was able to develop strong friendships. By late 2003, in OAC (Grade 13), I had regained my self-esteem and become active in various school functions which enabled me to become popular amongst my peers. My popularity earned me the title of Prom Queen in my senior prom.

At home, my role was consistent throughout my adolescent years. I played a traditional female role: chores, cooking, homework, and looking after my younger siblings. My parents raised us as moderately strict Muslims, and while we were cut off geographically from the rest of the Afghan community who lived in the Greater Toronto Area, we still attended Afghan and religious functions. My parents were still lenient in the sense that we were not expected to wear the hijab, as other strict parents would impose on their daughters.

My research interests for this study focus on the identity formation and negotiation of other female Afghan youth, who may not go through the extreme levels of racism I experienced, but nevertheless must balance their dual identities as a Muslim

Afghan and a Canadian. Just as my identity changed from the home to school, it is of value to see if and how participants' identities change over the different realms, and how, if any, factors, such as school and peers, play in their acculturation and identity negotiation process (refer to Figure 3: Factors affecting a person's identity negotiation and development processes).

Summary

In the current chapter, I provided an overview of the methodological process and theoretical framework (feminist methodology, critical race theory, and youth identity development theories) involved in this qualitative case study. In summary, a case study design and semistructure interviews were used to collect data from 6 female participants based on criterion sampling. Participants represent the different schooling systems in Ontario, public, Catholic and Islamic schools. Collected data were transcribed, member checked, and was followed by data analysis steps as suggested by Creswell (2007). Data analysis included open axial coding. Confidentiality was addressed, and ethical considerations were made to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Pseudonyms were used where necessary. A journal was kept to record reflective notes and memos throughout the process of data analysis and reporting of findings in the final report. Finally, this section provided a section on researcher reflexivity.

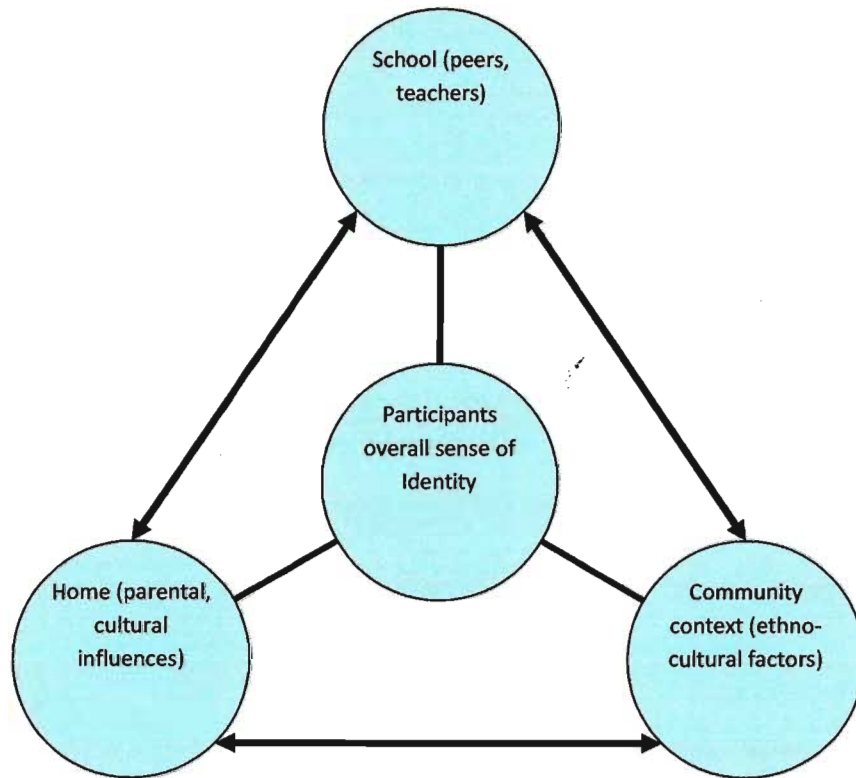


Figure 3. Factors affecting a person's identity negotiation and development processes.

Arrows represent the (potential) relationship between the contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The following chapter will discuss the various themes that have emerged out of interviews with the participants. Some of the themes are; parental influences on culture and religion, respect for parents, family obligations, schooling experiences, classroom dynamics, peer groups and school culture, resistance and survival strategies, “Othering”, Westernization, and influence of wearing the hijab. Following a brief synopsis of chapter finding, the subsequent chapter will review the overall procedure for data collection and analysis as described in the methodology section, as well as introduce the participants in a brief biographical sketch. Finally, this chapter will provide an analysis of the emerging themes and concepts arising out of participants’ experiences in home, school, and community.

For the context of home, the narratives spoke to the influence participant home life has on their overall identity development. Parental influence on children’s perception of culture and religion, along with parental role in influencing the educational and career goals of their daughters, becomes significant. As this study is a feminist based research study, interviews also shed light on the gender specific expectations parents have for their daughters. Participants also highlighted the important role which parents and other adults from the community have in terms of seeking advice and knowledge. These voices and opinions, along with the voices of their own parents, assist in framing and developing participants’ identity.

Outside of the home, the schooling experiences of participants were a significant realm to investigate in terms of its influence on identity negotiation and development. Participant experiences point to the role that both teachers and peers have in their identity

development process. Participants highlighted classroom dynamics, the school curriculum, their peer groups, and school culture as playing a role in their identity development. Furthermore, participant experiences revealed their resistance and survival strategies as a response to the “Othering” experienced by their peers. Consistent with youth development theory, all participants identified different factors influencing their friendship choices based on shared interests, values, and/or beliefs (Lerner, 2005). Westernization and friendship choices, along with the specific tribal and linguistic differences within the Afghan ethnicity, played a key role in participants’ identity negotiation and development.

Participants also discussed the importance of the greater Afghan community and how interaction with other Afghans fostered a sense of belonging within the community and reaffirmed a positive sense of identity. While Erikson (1963, 1968) refers to youth development in adolescence as a period for an enmeshed identity crisis, I explore this notion in a final category entitled Religious and Ethnic identity. This category is necessary considering participant experiences with Islam, and the stereotypes associated with being a female Afghan and Muslim. Participants are able to express their pride towards their culture and religion. Participants express their ethnicity is a source of strength which enables them to develop and balance their Afghan Canadian identity.

It is important to note that there are diversities in individual differences within the 6 participants. These individual differences can provide diverse outcomes and explain diverse development trajectories of youth. These developmental trajectories are relational to participant relationships with other individuals (peers, teachers, parents, etc.) and institutions (e.g., school; Lerner, 2002)

Documenting the Everyday Experiences of Afghan Canadian Female Youth

Six Southern Ontario Afghan Canadian Muslim female youth were interviewed on their experiences of everyday life. The interviews probed their identity and how they negotiated their identities between social contexts of home, school, and community life. Moreover, the impact of these experiences was theorized in relation to the girls' identity development (while being cognizant of race, ethnicity, and religion). These youth are first generation Canadian Afghans, ages 14-18, whose parents immigrated to Canada prior to their birth. Participants represented three very different school types in Ontario; Catholic, Islamic and Public schools, with 2 participants from each school.

Table 1: *Participant Information and Identification* introduces and identifies backgrounds of the 6 female participants. The dates for interview transcripts are listed in Table 1 and all names of individuals, places (with the exception of the Greater Toronto Area [GTA]) and schools identified in the thesis are pseudonyms.

The following sections in this chapter will identify the various themes and concepts that arose out of interviews with 6 Afghan female participants. The interviews support the methodology that considers feminist research because it uses methods that allow participants to act and speak freely. Such methods hone in on the voices that have not been heard (female Afghan Canadian youth) and, thus, validate these voices and experiences.

The interviews also support youth development theory in its exploration of the experiences of adolescent females. Interviews reveal the relational experiences of adolescents as they adjust to "changes in the self" (e.g., in relation to their gender,

Table 1

Participant Information and Identification

Pseudonym	Schooling type	Age	Interview Date (M/D/Y)	Degree of religiosity: Very religious/ Moderate/ Not very religious	Location
Zohal	Catholic	18	01/06/10	Very religious	Valley Hills
Naghma	Catholic	18	11/22/09	Moderate	Valley Hills
Ariana	Public	15	04/10/10	Moderate	Valley Hills
Serena	Public	16	04/12/10	Moderate	Blue Lake
Hijira	Islamic	17	03/07/10	Very religious	GTA
Laila	Islamic	17	03/07/10	Moderate	GTA

cognitive and emotional development, and social expectations). Such changes are brought upon by factors including family and peer group relations, along with institutional changes (e.g., within school structures; Lerner, 2005, pp. 8-9). The following chapter analysis investigates a smaller group of key persons and institutions involved within the home, school and community. The purpose is to examine the emerging themes which provide an illustration of the diverse experiences shared by female, Afghan Canadian adolescents throughout their process of identity negotiation and development.

Home, School, and Community Biographical Sketches of 6 Female Youth

Although participants were selected based on the school types attended, interview questions (Appendix A) were broader focusing on experiences in home, school, and community. It is important to introduce and situate the participants in terms of their experiences. While Table 1 identifies the participants, the following section will introduce each participant briefly. Participants are situated through introducing basic information such as their age, family background, reason for attending selected schools, community composition, and religious attitudes.

Zohal is 18 years old and attends a Catholic school located in the predominantly White neighbourhood of Valley Hills. Zohal is the third oldest in her family, she has four sisters and two brothers. Zohal lives with her parents who immigrated to Canada 30 years ago from Afghanistan. Zohal's parents chose for her to attend this school because her parents felt it had a strict curriculum. Another factor in attending a Catholic school is related to the constant monitoring (security cameras) and school uniforms, both which provide an added level of safety in the school. Her favourite subjects in school are Math, Science, and Law. Zohal plans to go to university where she can study Math and become

a mathematician or head of a high school Math department. Zohal describes herself as very religious.

Naghma is 18 years old and describes herself as moderately religious. She too attends a Catholic school located in her predominantly White neighbourhood of Valley Hills. Naghma is the eldest of four children in her family. She lives at home with her parents and siblings. Naghma's parents immigrated to Canada 30 years ago and have since moved only a few times, first living in Toronto before moving to Valley Hills. The reason why Naghma's parents chose for her to attend a Catholic school is also attributed to her parents concerns over safety with her school (security cameras), as well as the perceived notion of a drug free environment, and a more strict curriculum. Naghma's favourite subjects are English and Drama, and she plans to either go to college or university after high school.

Ariana is the youngest of the participants, she is 15 years old. She too describes herself as moderately religious and attends a public high school in predominantly White Valley Hills. Ariana is the eldest in her family; she has two younger siblings, a brother and a sister. Ariana's parents immigrated to Canada 17 years ago from Afghanistan. Ariana decided to attend a public school because it is conveniently located near her house. Ariana's favourite subject is Biology and, after high school, she plans on opening up a clothing store or boutique for teenagers. However, this conflicts with her parents' expectations for her to go to university to become a doctor.

Serena is 16 years old, and attends a public high school. Serena describes herself as moderately religious and lives in semidiverse Blue Lake. Serena is the second youngest in her family. She has two sisters, and two brothers. Serena's family immigrated

to Canada almost 20 years ago, living first in the GTA before moving to Blue Lake 7 years ago. Serena lives at home with her parents, siblings and maternal grandmother. Serena too attends a public school because of its convenient location. Serena does not have any favourite classes in particular; rather, her favourite classes are whichever ones her friends are in. Serena does have aspirations to go to university to become a physiotherapist for sports players.

Hijira is 17 years old and describes herself as very religious, and wears a hijab. Hijira is a middle child in her large, extended family. Her parents immigrated to Canada almost 20 years ago. Hijira has lived in the GTA for her entire life. She lives with 12 of her family members consisting of her parents, siblings (ranging from age 14-32), grandparent, sisters-in-laws, nieces, and nephew. Hijira explains that her family is spread between two houses located nearby one another. All family members get together for dinner time every night. She attends an Islamic school in the diverse GTA in order to learn more about Islamic history and the rules which she has not yet learned about. Her favourite subjects in school are Math and Science, and she hopes to study medicine in university.

Laila is also 17 years old and describes herself as moderately religious and also wears a hijab. Laila is the eldest in her family and has three younger sisters. She has lived in the GTA for her entire life, moving only once. Laila's parents immigrated to Canada over 30 years ago. She attends an Islamic school in the Greater Toronto Area as her parents thought that it would help her to learn more about Islam. Although the tuition at her school is costly, her parents feel that she would benefit more in the long run from

learning from an Islamic-centric curriculum. Laila's favourite subject is Math, and she hopes to attend university where she will study to become a doctor.

It is important to have a general biographical introduction of the participants in a manner that sets the framework and understanding for their narratives and experiences. An introduction to participants' backgrounds also makes it easier to comprehend and deconstruct the participant experiences. Following interviews with the 6 female youth, I coded the interviews thematically, and then organized them under the contexts of home, school, community, and ethnic/religious identity. I use themes to further analyze the interviews (see Table 2). Home, school, and community are important contexts to explore youth identity development because, according to youth development theories, it is within formal and informal settings (such as home, school, community) that youth are able to acquire the sociocognitive and emotional skills necessary (Lerner, 2005). It is within these contexts that pertinent relationships with peers, teachers, parents, mentors, and community members develop. It is through these relationships and associations that youth are able to shape their identities (Lerner, 2005; Phinney, 1990; 1996; 2003). I was able to organize the factors, relationships, and concepts which shape participants identity negotiation and development process in Table 2: *Description of Context and Themes*.

The following section will analyze the significance of each context and the themes emerging from within. As the following data analysis section will demonstrate, the effects of these themes on an individuals' identity are not isolated from one another; rather, these themes are closely interconnected with one another. From a feminist qualitative research perspective, I pay careful attention to the meaning making the female participants express in relation to their everyday lived experiences.

Table 2

Description of Contexts and Themes

Context	Themes
Home	Parental influence on culture and religion Parental influences on education and gender expectations Respect for parents and other community “parents” Family obligations
Schooling experiences	Teacher and classroom dynamics on race and religion Curriculum Resisting and surviving peer and school based “Othering” Westernization and friendship choices Tribal and linguistic differences
Community	Interaction with other Afghans and belonging within the community Religious and Ethnic identity
Religious and Ethnic Identity	Pride of culture and ethnicity Finding strength in resisting inaccurate ethnic stereotypes and portrayals Afghan Canadian identity: Balancing or suppressing dual identities

Furthermore, I analyze these narratives using a theoretically point of view that is informed by identities theories featured in Figure 1.

Home

It is crucial to note that youth development theory stress the fact that most youth share similar core values as their parents. For example, most youth value the importance of education, social justice, and the role of religion in the same manner as their parents (Lerner, 2002). Moreover, the cultural resources and practices present in many immigrant homes are unparalleled. Young persons' obligations towards their family, respect for parents and elders, and filial piety is stressed far more than individualistic and personal interests (Kwak & Berry, 2001). Although, rather than just a safe haven, research studies have also found the home to be a place for tension and conflict as youth try to balance and negotiate their personal and social identities (Foner, 1997). It is important to investigate to what extent home and family resources and practices influence youth identity development. Participant experiences at home and interaction with family members are greatly affected by norms and traditions in their traditional Afghan families. Of the three contexts (home, school, and community) all participants express that their identity and personal views are much different at home than elsewhere, such as at school or the community. Different factors, such as their parents, siblings, and familial obligations, play a significant role in how they express their identities and how their roles unfold when at home. This parental influence on identity is consistently revisited throughout all interviews. All participants express the important role which their parents play in their academic endeavors, cultural and religious identification and practices, and their future expectations.

Parental influence on culture and religion

Although Afghan culture and Islamic religion are two very distinct themes, for the purpose of this data analysis, I will combine parental views on culture and Islam together because they are so closely intertwined and difficult to separate. After Hijira finished discussing her pride in being Afghan, she attributed her proud culture to her parents and an inherent ability to subconsciously replicate their mannerisms. She tells how much she acts like her parents without realizing it, “It’ll shine out sometimes and I’m just like wow, because I usually make fun of my parents and now I do it too.” Referring to the mannerisms she has adopted from her parents, for example her outspoken pride or even “drinking five cups of tea daily,” Hijira starts to laugh, but then quickly goes back to reaffirming how this reinforces her Afghan identity. She calls herself “100% Afghan!” and continues to say,

I don’t even see myself Canadian at all. Cause once you go back home [Afghanistan] you’re like: Wow, all these people are exactly like me, like everything I’ve been living has been a complete lie. Cause like when you grow up here [Canada] you think: Oh I’m Canadian, I have to have the rights [Human rights, rights as a citizen, etc.] and stuff. But wait a minute, sometimes rights DO corrupt. And you have to realize...I don’t wanna be Canadian, I want to be Afghan.

In this quotation, Hijira is referring to the freedoms which most teenagers desire in her age group. Hijira refers to these freedoms as rights. For example, getting to stay out late, may be a right she has as a Canadian; however, as a protected Afghan female, it is a freedom reserved only for special occasions. Although the role of parents in her life is

important, Hijira also explains why “it is important for parents to back off and not try to be so pervasive in their children’s lives.” This is a problem she identifies with all Afghan youth who

tend to learn from their parents. And that’s not possible, you have to learn through your own mistakes. Obviously they don’t want you to make serious mistakes but you have to witness it firsthand, or feel it firsthand to actually understand.

Another significant problem that Hijira addresses is the generation gap between Afghan youth and their parents,

the thing with parents is that they’re so old school you can’t really change your parents. They have lived their lives and now they’ve chosen the way to teach you. The only person you can change is yourself. And you’re supposed to change it for the better.

In discussing Afghan parenting styles and the generation gap between Afghan youth and their parents, Hijira makes it evident that she is conflicted. While she states that individual rights and freedoms do not work, she also supports the notion that youth need to learn from their own mistakes. This contradiction becomes symbolic of the complexities in her narrative. Such complexities reveal the effects of an identity that is in between the margins. She is stressed between maintaining the position of a traditional Afghan female who is content with the status quo (i.e., not wanting to rebel and demand more freedoms from parents), yet she is also suggesting that parents should allow their children to rebel a little and perhaps make some mistakes so that their children can learn from them.

Naghma too addresses the generation gap between Afghan youth and their parents who are unable to identify with the experiences that Afghan youth undergo. The problem, according to Naghma, is that her parents are of a different generation and, thus, “have very old school beliefs from there. And this place is very modernized so people kind of don’t really follow religion. They drink, they do whatever; it’s a very different society here.” This is consistent with other research on immigrant youth identity development which shows the tensions that occur when immigrant youth, in the process for securing independence and developing their identity, may adopt new cultural values and practices while their parents would want to preserve their traditional values and beliefs (Kwak, 2003).

Naghma also talks about the role her parents play in her socialization and friendships with peers, and how her parents’ expectations conflict with her reality, which is another attribute of the generation gap. She tells me how important it is for Afghan parents to prefer their children to be friends with other Afghans rather than non-Afghans, “in our culture, your parents wouldn’t want you to be as close as you are with a Caucasian friend as if you were with an Afghan friend. It’s really different for us.” It is necessary to note that such dispositions are a reflection of the different value system that Afghan parents have which is culturally and religiously defined. As some Canadians may not necessarily understand the same religious and cultural value system, Afghan parents prefer to expose their children to other Afghans or Muslims who would share the same value system. This is similar to other studies that explore the protectiveness of parents in ensuring that their children are not exposed to negative influences (Maira, 2002; Shaffir, 1979; Zine, 2001).

Parental influences on education and gender expectations

Another aspect that is salient in the interviews is the significant role that parents play in their children's upbringing, particularly in terms of academic support and aspirations. Naghma, Serena, and Zohal indicate that their parents play supportive roles in their education. In terms of postsecondary education, for Naghma, "of course they [parents] want us all to go to college or university."

However, for Laila, Hijira, and Ariana, their parents have higher standards and expectations in terms of academics and future careers. All 3 participants expressed their parents' desire for them to go to university and graduate or postgraduate schools and become professionals. Ariana's parents want her to become a doctor because "it's a really good profession...and just a really good status to have...its successful." For Hijira, her parents have similar expectations, "first of all, they [parents] only want you to become an engineer, doctor, or like a dentist. My mom is so keen on me being a dentist." Laila's parents have similar expectations,

they want me to be a doctor or something so that they can be proud of me, my parents really went through a lot to get me into a good school. It's an even bigger deal for me to do well because I'm a girl, and most Afghan parents don't really expect too much from their daughters, just that they want them to get married into a good family. But my parents treat me more like a son 'cause they have such high expectations. I have to support them when I'm done school and when they are older.

It became evident to me that parents have different expectations from their daughters, as opposed to their sons. I had probed this issue in a broader sense when I asked participants

what their responsibilities were at home. For Laila, because her parents treated her like a son, she was expected to follow male dominant roles in the house. As the eldest in her family, she was responsible for indoor and outdoor household duties,

taking out the garbage, raking leaves, shoveling, if necessary, all that kind of outdoorsy stuff. I have to do it because my mom can't and because my dad is usually not home. My other siblings are too young to do that kinda stuff, I'm bigger and I'm healthier so I have to do it. If I had a brother, he would have to do that kinda stuff.

The masculine house and yard work responsibilities that Laila's parents expect from her symbolize parental transgressions of gendered norms.

Respect for parents and other community "parents"

A theme that occurred across some interviews is the amount of respect that the youth had for parents and adults in the community. Respect is always something which must exist on both sides regardless of whether youth agree with their parents decisions or not. Hijira states,

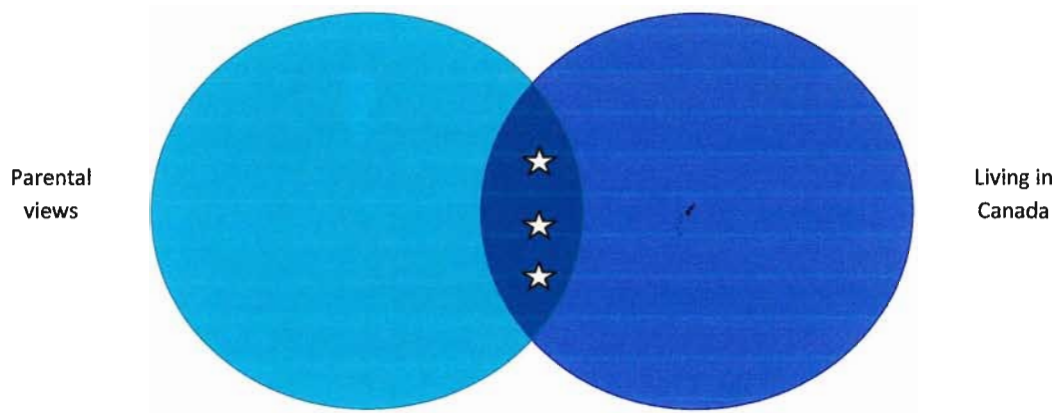
You can't- don't try to change your parents...nobody should disrespect their parents, they should take it in. and decide what they think is right. They should go to external sources like other Afghans and other educated people and ask them what their opinion is on this. Not to disrespect their parents but...everyone needs another opinion, if they can't make up their own mind on the spot then they need to...find another one.

Hijira's words describe the tensions experienced by a young woman who struggles with respecting both her parents' view and also trying to live in the West. The tension with the

two is explained by the fact that Hijira refers to other resources available within reach for young Afghans. Resources, such as friends' parents, or "educated people" (e.g., teachers) are excellent sources for advice. As Hijira attends an Islamic school, it is possible that she may be referring to the teachers in her school as advocates or persons to go to for advice when she is experiencing tension at home. Although there may exist tension between her parents' wishes and her own personal desires, the end result is a struggle to find her voice and identity. An overview of the tension which Hijira and other participants experience is illustrated in *Figure 4*. Respect for community members in lieu of parents was an issue that Laila also brought up. She said,

if I can't ever go to my parents about a problem, cause they are sometimes old school, then I can go to my aunt, she is a bit more liberal minded and I can also go talk to my friends' parents. They are easier to talk to cause they have been here longer.

If Laila could not find anyone in the Afghan community or her parents to speak to, then she referred to her "teachers at school because they know how to talk to kids and they have most likely been through it so yea, I can go to them." Both Laila and Hijira reflect the resourcefulness of using the greater Afghan and Muslim community (other adults, teachers, etc.) in helping youth to accommodate everyone's expectations while, at the same time, negotiating their own identity and defining who they are as Afghan Canadians.



☆ Star denotes the competing worlds in which participants live in (home, school, and community). The overlap in between these two worlds is the space which participants have to negotiate and formulate their own identities.

Figure 4. Complexities of living in two distinct worlds.

Family obligations

When it came to discussing obligations and responsibilities, all participants, except for Hijira, reported that their responsibilities included helping their mothers prepare meals and taking care of any younger siblings, as well as cleaning chores. As previously stated, Laila's responsibilities extended into traditional male chores outside of the house, chores such as "taking out the garbage...raking leaves...outdoorsy stuff...if I had a brother, he would do it."

Another theme that emerged from interviews is the influence that parents have in peer relations and friendships. This theme also surfaces when discussing schooling and community experiences. In particular is Zohal and Hijira's experiences about parental preferences in having Afghan friends over non-Afghan friends. This theme will be considered in schooling and community experiences.

Participants' home life indicated many important issues in participants' lives, the role which parents played in their children's academic success, and in their religious and ethnic identities were apparent across all interviews. Both narratives and youth development theories stress the fact that although youth spend increasingly more time with peers than with their parents, youth still place high importance to their relationships with parents (Lerner, 2005). While it is important to look towards the Afghan females' home lives, equally important is the role that their schooling experiences play in their identity negotiation and development.

Schooling Experiences

The following section discusses the schooling experiences of the participants while looking at the various themes (and subthemes) that have emerged. *Figure 5* is an

illustration of how this section will focus on giving voice to the student voices from their vantage point of view within the school system. Themes include teacher/classroom dynamics, curriculum, overall school culture/peers, and academic achievements. A more holistic analysis to the various themes as they arise in the narratives is demonstrated in Table 3 where I categorize the experiences from the perspective of the students towards their teachers and peers. In addition, Table 3 offers an illustration to some of the overarching issues which emerge throughout the student narratives. These issues arise from different contexts such as from the way in which teachers approach the students, how the students respond to the teachers, and how students respond to their non-Muslim peers, and vice versa.

As this study is within the framework of youth development theory, it is crucial to look at the relationships participants have with peers, most importantly their selection of friendships as most youth will create friendships with peers with whom they share similar interests, values, and/or beliefs (Lerner, 2005). As this study is informed by feminist methods, it is crucial to validate the female participants' interpretations by giving voices to them as marginalized groups (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Reinharz, 1992). It is important once again to give voices to marginalized groups and use their interpretations because of their lack of adequate representation yet they are "always authoratively spoken for and to" (Mogadime, 2004, p. 16).

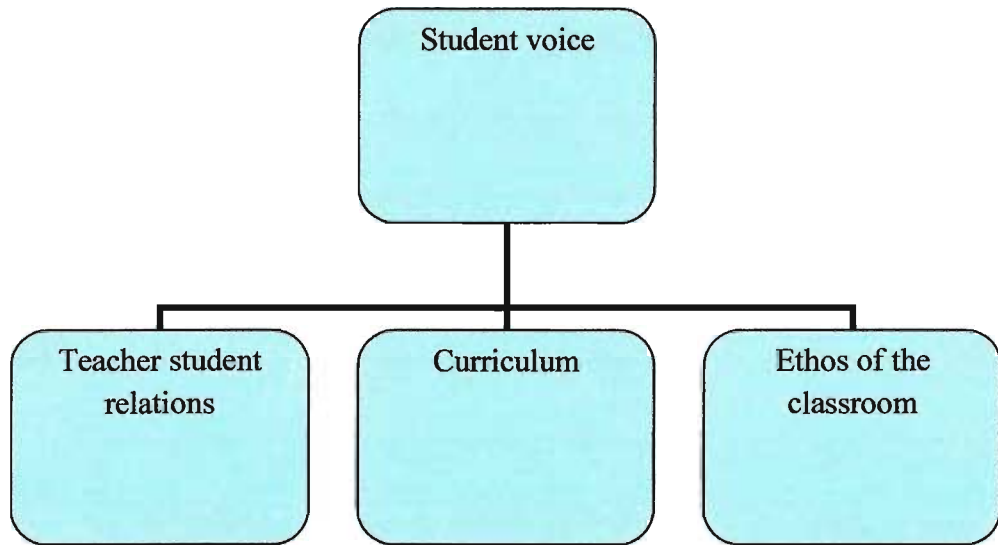


Figure 5. Student voices from various locations within the school system.

Table 3

Participant Perspective on Student Relations with Teacher and Peers in Classroom

A. Participant view of teacher/student relations	B. Participant view of student/teacher relations
a. Dominant white teachers “Othering” Muslim students	a. Resistance to “Othering” by white teachers
b. Differential treatment of Muslim students in the classroom	b. Criticality regarding differential treatment in the classroom
c. Negative evaluation as an outcome of cultural bias	c. Awareness of the impact of negative evaluation based on cultural bias
d. Missed opportunities to co-construct knowledge with students	d. Silencing of student’s religious knowledge basis and cultural identity
e. Disregard of multicultural ideals	e. Multicultural ideals unsupported
C. Participant view of (Non-Muslim) Peer to (Muslim) Peer Relations:	D. Participant view of (Muslim) Peer to (Non-Muslim) Peer Relations:
<p>“[non-Muslim peers] kind of look at you weird... Even if they say that they are your friends... when it comes down to religion, where they feel like their position and their social life is being at risk, they will ditch you in a second...you’re friends that you make in Catholic school. You will make friends but when it come down to the quality [of friends], they stick to their own people.” Zohal</p>	<p>“Nobody really knew we were Muslim...we didn’t have a problem with fitting in or anything...after they found out we were Muslim, then that’s when they are kind of like...you know... So we just stuck to our Muslim friends.” Naghma</p>
<p>“I try to take on the personalities of the people around me, not to the extent that I’m doing what they’re doing but where I can blend it, and it’s like even then, just them knowing that you’re not from Canada...you’re not Italian or whatever the majority is, they feel like they have the right to treat you differently...that’s where I think it’s secret racism, where there’s nothing physically ... or visibly wrong with you that they can attack... knowing that you’re different.” Zohal</p>	<p>“You are mostly friends with people who are from the same place and speak the same language because you are more sure that your parents will accept them and allow to have a life with them...usually our parents don’t let us...they don’t want us to be influenced a lot, and if they know you have a similar upbringing they won’t mind it as much.” Hijira</p>

According to narrative provided by the young women, peers play an important role in the classroom. Peers are important in relation to youth shaping their own identities because peers (along with parents, teachers, etc.) offer valuable guidance to one another on adolescent issues. Peers also fulfill an individual's desire to *belong*, or even be able to develop a strong sense of group identity and acceptance by ones' peers (Lerner, 2005). For minority students, this desire to belong can translate to intentionally seeking other minority students who can help them formulate their own racial and ethnic identity (Tatum, 1997).

Teacher and classroom dynamics on race and religion

Interactions with the teachers and classroom dynamics were very diverse across the different participants. Zohal and Naghma, both Catholic school students, report very different experiences with their teachers. Zohal spoke on her experience with teachers, and said that overall,

it's like that teachers have a problem with seeing other cultures in the schools, like be successful I guess. When they see like the Asian kid or the brown kid being smart, it bothers them. That's how it feels like. You can see the irritation in their faces sometimes. And they don't really talk to anyone else but their own and they always look at me with a slanted eye...give me treatment like I am a refugee or something.

Zohal speaks of her struggles in English class because

it's harder for me to connect in my English classes, just like the teacher usually just sticks more with the...certain population of the class...I just prefer the Math type of where it's just 'Yes' or 'No' type of answer...I don't have to wonder like

why I got a low mark on something and I know I did really good. And asking the teacher why I got a low mark is not gonna do anything and I know they are just gonna give me a dumb reason that does not make sense. That's usually what happens to me. Especially in Grade 11 English I remember I struggled so much. And everything I went to the teacher, I knew my stuff was good and sometimes I knew it was too good for her to handle, and she was an elderly white woman, and I knew she had a problem with it, she would give me a fake reason, she would always call my stuff "vague"

Zohal laughs nervously after stating this, and then quickly offers an example from Drama class where she felt discriminated against, "when they used to split us up for groups... I would always be in the group with the one Asian kid and the Spanish kid." Zohal explains how frustrated she would feel,

it sucks being born and raised here, you're pretty much like...I don't know why they treat you like that. But the funny thing is that the public school that is right around my house it's like, there is no racism there at all. Everyone just keeps to themselves. It's so much better there [public schools].

Zohal also offers another experience with her "elderly" Italian World Religions teacher who was suppose to spend 2 weeks discussing each of the major world religions. Zohal's teacher spent 2 weeks on Christianity and Buddhism but "when it came to Islam, she spent like 3 days." Zohal continued to explain that the lessons were cut short

...because one of the other girls' who had transferred from a public school, she was Somalian [Muslim] so she...used to correct the teacher every two sentences because she was teaching it wrong. And I remember she had a copy of the Quran

on her table and she had her...stapler on top of it, and the girl she was so offended she got up, she was like 'That's not how you treat the book, I don't know how you got it...they should have taught you at least how to treat it with respect'...she [teacher] didn't know how to handle her, and so the next day she just cut the...subject short, like literally 3 days from the 2 weeks.

Zohal goes on to tell me how she felt if there were other Muslims in the class who witnessed the disrespect towards the Quran, they too "would have been a lot more offended and said something," however, because it was just Zohal and the other Somalian student, they "just kind of had to take everything as it came and we couldn't really say that much."

While Naghma shared similar experiences with her teachers, she was the only participant who commented on the administration at her school. She states,

I didn't like our principal and vice principal...cause they are...strict...I got my nose pierced and my principal wouldn't let me have it [piercing]...and I had seen other students with it but because I got it, its kind of...one teacher pointed it out and I was like 'I wanna leave it on because in my culture, girls do it...I wanted it too'... they didn't like that, they were like 'No you have to take it out'...we agreed to keep a clear tap on it.

Naghma finishes this story by telling me that she would see other girls around the school wearing nose rings without being disciplined about them.

For Islamic school students Hijira and Laila, their experiences were slightly different than Zohal and Naghma's. Hijira's experiences do not go beyond the teaching styles of her teachers. Although her teachers were "regular teachers...like at any regular

school,” she is very critical of their knowledge and techniques. Laila is less critical and seemed rather content with her Islamic school teachers,

I like them because they are like me. They are Muslim and I feel that I can identify with them. They get excited over stuff like Eid, and they really make you feel like you’re at home, like you’re family to them. They’re really nice so long as you take a positive approach towards learning. And I know that if a teacher doesn’t like me, it’s not cause of race or my culture or whatever, it’s probably because I did something bad.

For Ariana and Serena, who both attend public schools, their experiences with teachers are mixed. Ariana is really excited about school “because it’s interesting, and the teachers are really interesting and nice good teachers.” However, Ariana demonstrates her shock when she finds herself explaining Islamic religious holidays to her teachers.

We have a religious holiday called Eid and before that, we fast...my teacher and a couple of other teachers they don’t really understand so I had to explain to them why we do this and how it’s in our religion...I can’t believe that they don’t really understand like my religion because I understand like most of every religion like Christianity and...Christmas and stuff, so Eid is equivalent to our Christmas so when...most of teachers didn’t understand what Eid was I was pretty shocked.

Serena, on the other hand, does not like her teachers, who are her least favourite part about school. Serena tells me that “some of my teachers are rude...my Biology teacher...she’s really mean to me all the time.” This attitude, according to Serena, may be because it was her teacher’s first year of teaching

so she doesn't really know how to teach, so she's really hard on everything. And she's stuck up...there is this hijabi girl, she sits right beside me and she feels like it's directed to her specifically but I also feel like she doesn't like me either...I do good in Biology. She's always, she's rude and...she always talks about how she was bullied as a kid so I don't know.

Curriculum

Laila and Hijira, both Islamic school students, did not comment on their school curriculum as often as Zohal and Naghma. Laila said she was excited because it's nice to hear about contributions that Muslims have made to society. It's refreshing to see that Muslims are important and we have really done a lot. But it is also sad because the only reason I know this is because I'm learning about it in school. Not every person is going to have the same privilege.

Hijira explains a similar response to the curriculum; she feels contentment and pride in the representation of Muslims in the curriculum.

Public school students Ariana, and Serena, did not comment on any significant difficulties with the school curriculum. They did comment on teaching practices which will be discussed at a later point. However, for Catholic school students, Zohal and Naghma, the curriculum is a significant source of contention. Initially, Zohal talks about her preferences for Math and Science over English.

I like the logical aspect of stuff...I don't really like English cause there is a lot of, I guess, unfairness and bias when you're handing in your work, when you're like when you do Math and stuff, everything makes sense. There is either a right answer or a wrong answer. And for people like us, especially if you are Afghan,

you can excel in those classes 'cause no one can say anything. But then when I go to my English class for example, or my Family Studies class, or even my Religion class, I'm getting 70s for some reason. I'm trying so hard, and it's frustrating so you just don't take a liking to those type of courses.

Moreover, when it came to the topic of Islam in her World Religions class, the material taught

didn't really give a chance for everyone around us to really understand what she [teacher] was saying...some people who weren't here for the first day or some weren't here for the third day...didn't really do good at all. She [teacher] just kind of went through the pillars and the Book, what it was called, and who the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was and that's pretty much it.

Zohal also brings up the concept of "secret racism" in the curriculum. According to her definition,

secret racism...[is] where someone who wears a scarf and everything or the people who have an accent, when people are racist, you know its racism. But for me, it's like I didn't have any of those things, plus I don't have an accent, like I really...I try to take on the personalities of the people around me, not to the extent that I'm doing what they're doing but where I can blend it, and its like even then, just them knowing that you're not from Canada...you're not Italian or whatever the majority is, they feel like they have the right to treat you differently. And that's where I think it's secret racism, where like there's nothing physically 'wrong' with you or visibly wrong with you that they can attack...just knowing the fact that you're different.

Naghma also discussed some of her experiences with how teachers follow the curriculum in her school. She speaks about an example in her World Religions, similar to the one Zohal mentioned earlier, where Naghma's teacher spent weeks discussing the major religions of the world in depth, however, the lesson on Islam was very brief. Moreover, Naghma states that she does not

agree with a lot of what they said either too, because I remember there was one part they were talking about...Shiite Muslims, saying that they were all Muslims and I had said to the teacher 'There is another kind too', and she made a comment like 'Oh well that's just confusing.' And I felt like telling her 'Well there are three branches of Christianity, that's confusing.' But I didn't say it... I didn't really like that class.

Naghma highlights the interesting fact that her teachers are ignoring the expert knowledge that students have of their own communities. As a result, teachers are missing opportunities to learn from their students and become co-teachers along with their Muslim students. After laughing, Naghma states,

I think that they should just stick to their own...like not try to teach about...nobody taught us about Catholicism or Christianity because we were raised as Muslims, and that's what we are going follow. They try to educate their kids in that way but they don't really tell them the right information... and then these kids learn that...I try to tell many kids and like some listen, some are very interested, not all kids.

Naghma introduces a separatist view in her narrative above. Such view is explained by Brown and Shaw (2002) as belonging to minorities who are less acculturated and more

likely to distance themselves from Western values. While Naghma is not trying to distance herself from Western values, she is trying to distance her Western peers from learning (inaccurately) about Islam. As for the teacher's reaction to Naghma correcting her, Naghma states that

I was new to the school and she [teacher] didn't really know me well so I think she just brushed it off but if I was a student she had known and taught for a few years, then she would have asked me or wondered because I am a Muslim.

Obviously I'm not lying. But she just seemed really uninterested...in the end she just brushed it off.

Resisting and surviving peer and school based "Othering"

According to youth development theory, most youth will develop friendships and relationships with peers who share the same set of values or core beliefs (Lerner, 2005). As participant narratives explain, this is not just true for participants but it is also true for peers at their schools. Within the school setting, peers and the overall school culture play an important role in students' identity formation and negotiation. Aside from how teachers treat minority students, the way in which minorities are treated by peers and the type of environment that schools foster are important factors to consider. Zohal states that she often has to think before speaking and correcting her teachers not just because of resistance from teachers, but also from her peers who

kind of look at you weird, they're like just telling you to relax...but they don't know how much of a big deal it is...they [peers] always side with the teachers.

It's like no one really sticks up for you. Even if they say that they are your friends...when it comes down to religion, where they feel like their position and

their social life is being at risk, they will ditch you in a second...you're friends that you make in Catholic school. You will make friends but when it come down to the quality [of friends], they stick to their own people.

As a result, Zohal states that her experiences “with that school is just the worst experience”.

It is vital to note that Zohal is able to overcome the social barriers at school. She overcomes the obstacles by honing her survival strategies, being more independent, and focusing on the positive aspects of school. More specifically, Zohal states that over her high school years, “I have learned to handle it much better I guess...you learn to deal with it, learn to ignore certain parts, fit in where you need to fit in, and then stay away where you need to stay away.”

Zohal also speaks of her experiences with isolation, specifically during the Catholic ceremonies where “people just stare at us. It’s pretty awkward...everyone stares. It’s like weird because they know what multiculturalism is but even them, they act like kids, the teachers there. So I don’t get it.” It is through such instances that Zohal is “othered,” not only by peers but also her teachers. This “Othering” occurs based on her ethnicity and religion. It occurs because her teachers are rejecting the notions of multiculturalism. Rather than embracing difference and diversity in students (in terms of her ethnic and religious differences), Zohal feels that her teachers dismiss multiculturalism as a realistic part of diversity. This is a critical race feminist perspective because Zohal’s realization reaffirms the fact that racism is an ordinary and fundamental part of society; in this case, society represented by the schooling environment and that race is a social construction (Berry, 2009). The perceived racism from her teachers is also

consistent with other studies on minority youth who too report discrimination and prejudice from teachers (Khanlou, et al., 2008).

Zohal is able to use her survival instincts when it comes to peer based discrimination. Specifically, when it comes to discrimination, based on her gender, Zohal describes how she inadvertently intimidates and evokes fear in her female peers. She feels that other girls perceive her as threatening

in the sense that I'm just like them, equal to them...they play this stereotype...like predispositions of what to expect but then they see that I try to kill them with kindness. So then they are just thrown off...or they have nothing to talk about the 'weird' Afghan girl cause they see that I'm pretty normal. But...they still play on the stereotypes, even though I'm just like them.

It is interesting that Zohal considers herself to be "like them" regardless of her ethnic and religious differences. Zohal is able to maintain her religious identity while simultaneously being vigilant to her Canadian identity; an identity which she shares with all her peers (Maira, 2002). As a result, Zohal's identity is not fixed but rather, it shifts depending on her environment and social contexts. She can either see herself as an Afghan, a Muslim, or a Canadian, depending upon her environment and the necessity to adapt. Zohal's narratives demonstrate her flexibility and adaptation skills; however, her narratives also explain that the majority of her non-Muslim peers are unable to navigate and adapt across similar boundaries.

Resistance from peers gives Zohal an opportunity to empower herself. She states that she does not let the resistance by her peers deter or upset her; rather, Zohal uses such experiences as survival strategies. Instead of responding with equal hostility and

resistance, Zohal chooses to treat her peers with “kindness”. Such a reaction enables her to become stronger, more confident, and independent. In fact, it becomes

so easy for me to keep to myself. It gives me a reason to keep to myself...its easier for me to be like ‘Now I’m definitely not gonna get into any of these cliquy things’, it keeps you more focused.

More importantly, Zohal explains that her survival strategies have also strengthened her in “help[ing] me appreciate so many other things in my life. I appreciate family and I appreciate friends that I do have.” Overall, Zohal explains that she would not send her own children to a Catholic school because

they have strictly made Catholic schools for the purpose of, I guess separating the people that are like us, so I guess after you experience it you think ‘Man, this is for my own good, I deserve to be in a public school’, but then you see the stereotypes of people who go to public schools. You are kind of set up. You are doomed either way.

It was important for Zohal to further emphasize that her experiences within the Catholic school helped her to “have this outlook...[where] you can be one sided, like one minded for your whole life until you have seen racism at its truest, rawest stages...it really changes the way you see life.” As one of the few minorities in her school, Zohal does not socialize too often with her non-Muslim peers.

In terms of socializing and interacting with her peers, Naghma also states that she gets treated “kind of like a stranger” by her peers. This was a very different treatment then from initially, before her peers knew that she was Muslim,

Nobody really knew we were Muslim...we didn't have a problem with fitting in or anything...after they found out we were Muslim, then that's when they are kind of like...you know... So we just stuck to our Muslim friends.

However, Naghma was quick to point out that because of her strong attitude, "nobody could really say anything." Naghma was also quick in stated that "some of these people [peers] are really nice...but...I kept to myself you know, it wasn't really my space to shine I guess."

While Naghma and Zohal identified themselves as treated as "others" by the majority of their classmates, they still maintained close friendships with the few Muslims in their school. Most important is the fact that both women use various survival techniques to become empowered and look past the hostility from their peers.

Resistance is critical to the survival skills that Naghma and Zohal employ when experiencing adversity from peers and teachers. However, there are consequences to resistance; they become disliked by their teachers and by their peers. What happens then is an inner struggle for Zohal and Naghma. This inner struggle occurs between being acknowledged and oppressed by peers and teachers. The result of this struggle is both young women are silenced and alienated in the classroom. Their voices are silenced and their experiences are deemed unimportant and insignificant. Their cultural and religious background and knowledge become trivial to the overall ethos of the classroom. What makes Zohal and Naghma's narratives powerful is that they are able to make this a positive situation. They are able to reflect more on their own identities and value what is important to them. However, for all other participants, their peers play a drastically different role in their socialization and friendships.

For Serena and Ariana, who both attend public school, their experiences with their peers and the overall school culture is drastically different. Although Ariana has two other Afghans who attend her high school, they are both males and she does not socialize with them. Her circle of friends consists of mainly White peers, with one being a non-White Muslim girl. In terms of socialization with peers and the overall school culture, Ariana's experiences are typical of teenagers, she enjoys "hangouts" at lunchtime with her friends and going to the mall with them after school. Ariana does not report any feelings of being left out or alienation from peers. She does, however, report that she does not feel comfortable with some of the stereotypes perpetuated by some of her peers. Stereotypes such as the "whole terrorist thing" and "how women don't have rights" bother her at times. However, despite indications of deep-seated racism presented in the form of teasing, Ariana tells me that at school she feels proud to be Afghan, and tries her best to show her pride in her culture. Serena's predominantly White and non-Muslim friends are accepting of her cultural and religious identity, and she does not share any experiences suggesting discrimination.

Westernization and friendship choices

Once again, it is important to draw back to youth development theory which states that youth will develop friendships with peers who share similar core values and beliefs (Lerner, 2002, 2005; Phinney et al., 2006; Shaffir, 1979). The following participant narratives demonstrate the success of such friendship making strategies. Participants explain their friendships with peers based not solely on ethnicity but also on shared interests, such as music or clothing. Like Ariana, Serena also attends a public school that has a small population of Muslims and Afghan students. Serena enjoys the social aspect

of school, specifically her “spare” (study period with no scheduled class) where she gets to socialize with friends who have the same period spare. Serena tells me that there are about 6 other Afghan students at her school but she does not socialize or interact with them because “they are embarrassing.” Serena elaborates and explains to me that they are embarrassing because “they are new to the country.” Serena explains that the way she dresses is much different than from how the newly arrived Afghan immigrants dress. Serena is too westernized and, as a result, “they [Afghan peers] will stare at what I am wearing.” Serena also tells me that the 6 or so Afghans mostly socialize with one another and “do not hang out with anyone outside of each other...’cause they speak the same language. But I don’t speak their language...they speak Farsi, but I speak Pashto.”

Farsi and Pashto are the two official languages of Afghanistan, and it is interesting that participants raise the issues of tribal and linguistic differences within Afghanistan. In brief, there are two major languages in Afghanistan, Pashto and Dari (Farsi). There are numerous tribal groups in Afghanistan, the largest (over 40%) being Pashtuns, who speak Pashto. Other groups include Uzbeks, Hazaras, Aimaqs, etc. who speak Dari (Farsi), and are generally referred to as Farsiwans. Pashtuns are a tribal and linguistic group, whereas Farsiwans are a linguistic group of different tribes. It should be noted that even the Pashtuns are comprised of countless, distinct tribes.

Referring back to Serena’s experiences with the other Afghan students, Serena continues to tell me that even if she spoke the same language as them (Farsi), she would not interact with them. Rather, Serena is content in socializing with friends who dress similar to her and share similar interests. Once again, this reaffirms youth development theories stating that youth tend to associate with other youth based on similar interests

and beliefs (Lerner, 2002; Phinney et al., 2006). She is quick to point out that she has a myriad of friends from different cultures, and she does not only have White friends. “They are not all White”, she explains, “I have different cultured friends, too. They are more like me than they [Afghan peers] are.” Her circle of friends all dress alike and have similar interests, such as in music. Serena explains to me that “We all like the same type of music, we like the same type of stuff like that...and we have the same classes because they [friends] are not in ESL.”

Serena demonstrates her ability to maintain a “multicultural or polycultural citizenship” identity, that is, be able to form relationships with non-Afghans and also non-Muslims and create a more inclusive community for herself (Maira, 2002). Serena is able to create friendships that cross “ethnic and racial boundaries” through forming relationships over shared interests, rather than over ethnic or religious similarities (Maira). It is interesting that Serena does not form similar friendships with the other Afghans in her school. When I asked her about this, she states

all the Afghans are in ESL, well most of them are. There is one who is not but she is kinda like...when we were talking about Afghanistan and stuff like that, we read *Kite Runner*, she was just being [negative] about it. She made it sound like...you know how Afghans are distributed into different tribes and stuff? And how like they made my people look like savages and stuff like that.

Serena does form relationships with other Muslims in her school, as do the other participants. This ability to form relationships with other Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds, such as Somalia or Sudan, enables Muslim youth to form “an incipient pan-Islamic identity” (Maira, p. 224) which helps reinforce their own Muslim identity.

Surprisingly, Serena's discussion reveals her resistance to forming friendships with other Afghans, she brings out the fact that she is unable to socialize with other Afghans in her school due to tribal and linguistic barriers.

Tribal and linguistic differences

It becomes interesting here that Serena classifies Afghans into distinct tribal categories. Therefore, I curiously asked her to whom "my people" was a reference, and Serena explains that her "people" are

the Pashtuns, they [non-Pashtuns] made us look like drunken woman beaters. And she is Hazara [different tribe]...and they always say like how Pashtuns...live in the village and how we are all barbaric and Farsiwans live in the city and are so cool, stuff like that. It's just like shut up. And all the Farsiwans are the biggest fobs [acronym for 'fresh off the boat', reference to newly arrived immigrants] ever...they just came to the country and yet they think that they are so cool, they are so embarrassing but they are so insecure.

Overall, Serena states that at school she considers herself to be more Canadian than Afghan, especially "in comparison to the Afghans there [at school]."

The issue of tribal and linguistic differences also plays a factor in Laila and Hijira's Islamic high schools, where there are more diverse representations of Afghans. According to Laila, she spends most of her free time in school socializing with her Afghan and non-Afghan friends. Laila spends most of her time

hanging out, just talking and eating and regular stuff, with the other Pashtun girls...we know one another from our families and so most of us have grown up together and so we're like sisters, we know how to make one another laugh and

we know how to push one another to the edge...when we fight, it's bad, but we're like sisters so we usually make up with one another pretty quick. You can't do that with your White friends. You can't call them a bad word today and then have lunch with them tomorrow, at least I can't. I can't even do that with the other Muslim girls, I don't know those girls and I can't trust them the way I trust my own Afghans...my friends are like my sisters...their parents are like mine, I know that I can trust them but I also know that they will be the first to yell at me or correct me if I'm wrong, and they aren't ever afraid to do it.

For Laila, the bond which she shares with her Afghan (Pashtun) peers is in a sense a strong sisterhood, a connection that reaches deep outside of the school and into the home. As a result of this strong connection and friendship with other Afghans, at school, Laila is "completely Afghan. I'm there to represent Afghans, Pashtuns, I'm there to make sure that Pashtuns have a good reputation."

For Hijira, there is a similar connection with her Afghan, specifically Pashtun, peers. She explains the formation of cliques within her predominantly Muslim school. "We have a little clique going...we have the Pashtuns, us Pashtuns tend to stay together, then there's the Black people, the Pakistanis, the Punjabis...they [student population] are all segregated." It was interesting to hear of the segregation between the Afghans, therefore, I further probed and asked, "Why are the Afghans segregated?" According to Hijira, this segregation is a result of the

civil drama back home. And they [Afghans] tend to, not like one another because of um...they don't like the way each other acts. We, the Pashtuns know how free [liberal, westernized] the Farsiwans tend to be, and we just categorize them. It is

usually the parents that put that into their heads. But some people smarten up and realize that's not the case and some people are just raised differently. And the Farsiwan people are told that we are very crazy and we are strict. And to us, we are not strict but nobody understand what we are going through when you are not...a part of the thing.

This notion of segregation within the Afghan community draws attention to the complexities of the Afghan culture that most people outside of the culture do not understand. Similar to Serena's diverse group of friends, Hijira is quick to point out that she is friends with other Pashtuns, but also with Arabs and Pakistani friends as well. This is reminiscent of Serena's discussion on friendships with other Muslim immigrants. Both females express a sense of connection with other racialized and Muslim peers; this occurs frequently despite the challenges that Muslim identity has presented to liberal multiculturalism (Maira, 2002, p. 225). Just as Hijira suggests that when it comes to forming friendships and peer relationships with other Afghans and Muslims, it is an easy process because

You are mostly friends with people who are from the same place and speak the same language because you are more sure that your parents will accept them and allow to have a life with them...usually our parents don't let us...they don't want us to be influenced a lot, and if they know you have a similar upbringing they won't mind it as much... So if two Pashtun families and you...you kind of have a vague idea on how they're both raised to be very modest, to be very modest outside, to not be loud. So my family is really more likely to let me be outside with a Pashtun girl, rather than a Farsi girl who is not really used to those rules.

This is another reason why it is easy for Hijira to be friends with mostly the Pashtun girls because “they have the same rules.” Rules in this sense refer to the restrictions on hanging out too much outside of the school or going out in the evenings with friends. Having friends who have the same rules from similar minded parents means not having to make excuses and having friends who understand what is going on “at home.” This is an important factor to note because it aligns with youth development theory in that Hijira is selecting her friends based on core values and beliefs (Lerner, 2005), such as ethnicity and religion; however, other participants select their friendships based on values and beliefs in relation to popular culture, music, or clothing preferences. Despite the rules, both Hijira and Laila express a strong sense of Afghan identity at school, amongst their Afghan friends. Serena and Ariana explain the dynamics with other Afghan peers with whom they do not socialize, and Zohal and Naghma explain the dynamics of going to a predominantly White school, with very few Muslims and no Afghans. Themes, such as racism and discrimination both within the curriculum and from their teachers and peers, play an important part in how these girls come to formulate their overall identity at school. The following section will attempt to explain the themes that emerge when looking at the process of identity negotiation in the community.

Community

While the last two sections investigated themes arising out of home and schooling experiences of female Afghan youth, the last section will investigate the realm of the overall Afghan community in shaping Afghan youth’s processes of identity formation and negotiation. This section will investigate the thematic influences of the Afghan community on socialization with other Afghans, family dynamics, and personal identity.

Interaction with other Afghans and belonging within the community

For Zohal, who attends a predominantly White Catholic school, she is unable to socialize with many Afghans not only at school but also outside of school, in the community. While there are a few other Afghans in her White community, “they [Afghans] kind of keep to themselves... [and] we keep to ourselves a little bit.”

Furthermore, Zohal’s family is not active within the greater Afghan community in the neighbouring city. Zohal used to attend the Afghan functions as a child but

when you grow up, people change, and my parents noticed that a lot of the girls that we used to talk to don’t really talk to us anymore so we don’t get as excited to go to places, and if we do its just my parents that go just for the fact of showing up for their friends and not letting them down.

For Naghma, she stresses the importance of being around other Afghans, particularly developing friendships with other Afghans. She explains, “people need friends in their life, and if you can have friends who are other Afghans, meet other Afghans then it is kind of hard to build really strong relationships.” Naghma does not report a strong connection to the greater Afghan community. “We used to be [connected] because we lived in Toronto before, but I think that it’s so far, we try to be, we still go to Afghan function...but we can only go so often.”

For Serena and Ariana who both attend public school, Afghan community functions provide a bigger venue in which they can interact with other Afghans. For Serena, the Afghan community functions provide an atmosphere for her to interact and socialize with other Afghan Canadian youth who are like her and “less like the ones that just came to the country,” the youth at these functions are “more balanced...they blend in

because of the way they dress and stuff, but hey still speak the same languages as me but we both still identity as being Afghan.” The friends Serena makes at the Afghan functions are different from the friends whom she makes at school because they have more in common. For Ariana, the Afghan community holds regular

festivals and events, special events that we go to and it’s really fun, we get to see other Afghans and our Afghan friends that live in Toronto. The only time that we can get to see them is at these events.

The Afghan community, in the form of the events and celebrations, are key places for socialization between Ariana and her friends.

Laila states that she likes attending the Afghan celebrations and gatherings because “you can be around other people just like you. You can never feel left out or think that you have no friends...you are going to make a different friend every time you go to one of these functions.” Laila also tells me the significant role which the functions play in her friendships,

it’s fun going to these because like most White people have proms and parties where they have excuses to dress up fancy and do whatever, and when we go to an Afghan Eid party, it’s our turn to dress up and go all out. It is always fun like planning our outfits and stuff weeks in advance. ‘Cause these functions don’t occur too often, and when they do happen, you really have to go all out, just like you would go all out for a prom, well this is our thing.

The notion of “theirs” and “ours” in Laila’s comments reveals a split from mainstream Canadian culture, and a reliance on the Afghan community, specifically the community functions.

Although Zohal does not frequently attend the Afghan functions, when she does, she feels

really, really peaceful...as if I'm right where I should be... it's really fun...Every time we come home from any Afghan event we always say, 'Oh this is the best day of our life' That kind of thing.

In this sense, the Afghan community is essential in reaffirming Zohal's pride towards her culture and ethnicity. The Afghan community provides a sense of belonging that her Catholic school is unable to offer.

The Catholic school that Naghma attends is also unable to give her exposure to other Afghans or Muslims. However, the Afghan community gives Naghma opportunities to interact with other Afghans. Although these opportunities are seldom, when Naghma does attend the Afghan functions, she states that although it is fun

it only lasts so long...when you come here [Valley Hills] you lose touch with them. Then when you meet up its fun because you haven't seen each other in years, but then you kind of don't really know each other at the same time...its fun but sad at the same time.

There is a clear disconnection between Naghma and the greater Afghan community.

For Serena, the Afghan community helps her to reassert her Afghan identity. She states that when she is with other Afghans, she sees herself as "being more Afghan, or when I am in Toronto...I see myself as being more Afghan." Furthermore, Serena describes her feelings and emotions when attending Afghan functions, "When I am around other Afghans, I obviously feel Afghan pride...but its not like I feel embarrassed around Canadians, but obviously I feel more connected."

This connection or sense of belonging is also echoed for Ariana, who states that the Afghan community functions enable her to “feel really happy because it is really fun. I just love it a lot.”

Laila also beams with excitement when she talks about her sense of belonging within the Afghan community at a recent party,

We were all dressed up and it was like the prom...it is amazing ‘cause in every direction that you look, you see someone that is like you. You are eating stuff that your mom and dad can eat too, you are listening to music that your parents are dancing to, and you don’t have to worry about censorship...family friendly... everywhere you look it’s stuff that makes you feel like you are in the right place. You automatically feel comfortable once you go to any Afghan function.

For Hijira, Afghan community functions are a way for her to be around other Afghans. While she does acknowledge linguistic differences in the community, she does state that while she is at the functions, she feels “at home. It [functions] is a bunch of Pashtuns and Farsi people, but it is still all Afghans so you feel comfortable.” This comfort level is attributed to the fact that “you still have the thing that ties you together, all have the same culture.” Hijira brings attention to the “polyculturalist notion of boundary crossing” (Maira, 2002, p. 224) on a micro level. Despite the differences between the different tribal and linguistic groups, Hijira admits that she is able to socialize with and be comfortable with Afghans from different backgrounds, not just her own. This contradicts her earlier statements about not being friends with non-Pashtuns at her high school. It is interesting, however, that Hijira is willing to “boundary cross” within the community; however, at school she allows for the tribal and linguistic barriers

to prevent her from forming friendships with non-Pashtuns. I suspect that it is easier for Hijira to “boundary cross” in a controlled environment, such as a community event where parents and elders can monitor most activities, and where the overall focus is on an hour long celebration. However, in an environment, such as school, where issues ranging from boys, to gossiping and clothes last an entire school year, it may make it more difficult to commit to “boundary crossing” and be friends with someone of a different ethnic/linguistic group for so long. Issues of trust may also play a role, whereas in a community function, conversations are usually kept very light and friendly. However, in school, conversations are lengthy and may even be controversial. Therefore, I think I can understand why it is acceptable to “boundary cross” in one context but not in another.

The impact of the Afghan community, through the various functions, such as Eid celebrations, and wedding parties, all enable a sense of pride and community amongst the participants. It is within the greater Afghan community, either within the same city or a different city, that participants are able to interact with other Afghans and be able to develop their identity as an Afghan.

The greater Afghan community, schooling experiences, and experiences at home all in some way shape the overall identity negotiation process for Afghan youth. The following section will discuss the overall themes that emerged when participants discussed their religious identity as Muslims and ethnic identity as Afghans over the discussions of home, community, and schooling experiences.

Religious and Ethnic Identity

For the female Afghan participants, a salient theme across the interviews was the influence of Islam and the Afghan culture. It was important for my research to investigate participants' attitudes towards their religious (Islamic) and ethnic (Afghan) backgrounds.

Influence of Islam

Although the degree of religiosity varied across my participants (from moderately religious to very religious), Islam certainly played a role in their life. I asked participants if they would consider themselves "Very religious, moderate or not very religious." Serena and Ariana, both public school students, stated that they identified as being "moderate" and did not expand on their selection. Hijira, who attends an Islamic school, offered an equally quick response, she stated she was "very religious" but did not expand upon it despite my attempts at probing for further information. Laila stated that she was "moderately religious" and stated that she was "getting there." As for Naghma and Zohal, both Catholic school students, they offered more descriptive, yet very different, responses.

Zohal offered the strongest response as she stated that she was "very religious" and elaborated by stating that she was a "Muslim first and always." Furthermore, she states,

I think that compared to the Muslims I've seen and grown up in the area that we have lived in. I'm much more religious than more of them. Cause it's so hard to lose your religion, but I think that I've kept mine more than the average person has...I've kept my values.

While Zohal showed a confidence in her faith, for Naghma, Islam was more of a struggle. As she explains her struggles in her faith, Zohal reveals how she negotiates between the spatial contexts,

My parents raise us as Muslims but living in a society where everyone is modernized sometimes it's harder for us the second generation [Zohal is first generation] to stick to those rules. Especially when like I go to a Catholic school, so everyone is Catholic...So I kind of try to balance out my life.

Zohal finishes this thought by telling me that despite everything, on the “inside I know I am Muslim.”

On wearing the hijab

Although I did not specifically investigate the role of the hijab (headscarf) with my female participants, it did come up in several interviews. For Hijira, who wears a hijab, it was really important for her to discuss how her parents have influenced her decision to wear a hijab.

First of all, you don't have to wear it, your parents just want you to smarten up a little bit because once you smarten up...you realize it is actually a good thing, it's to help you preserve yourself, it actually makes you a stronger person...nobody can force you. You have to choose yourself. It is just the age when they kind of imply that you should [wear it].

The hijab is depicted as a tool for strength in Hijira's case. It makes her stronger because she sees it as empowering. From personal experiences of wearing the hijab and experiencing discrimination as a result, I understand exactly why Hijira is strengthened by it. Despite the resistance one may experience from wearing it, wearing a hijab

regardless demonstrates strength of unwavering faith and belief. The hijab as a tool of strength was something which Muslim women pointed out in Silvestri's (2011) study, as well as Muslim students in Zine's (2006) study. Muslim women in Otterbeck's (2011) study stated that although they only wore the hijab occasionally (i.e., for prayers, and at the Masjid) it is important to understand ritual behaviours in relation to the "social environment, and to time, and space" (p. 1179). For Naghma, she tells me that although her mom still wears a hijab, "none of us [siblings] do because my dad never forced us to, he's an outgoing guy and so is my mom." In Naghma's case, the hijab is optional, and while she demonstrates respect for it, she does not see it as a necessity for Muslim females since her parents [father] did not impose it on to her.

Ariana, who attends a public school, also does not wear a hijab, and for her, her decision is "kinda like a choice...cause my parents never really forced it on me...I was born here...it just never occurred to me like I should be wearing a hijab."

Laila brought up the hijab in a similar fashion, the role of her family (particularly her father) in determining whether or not the garment should be worn was also brought up with Laila, who tells me she wears it because of respect for herself, her family, and her faith.

Only really strong people can wear it. It takes a lot to be able to wear a hijab in this society. It's easy at school [Islamic school] for sure but man it's a struggle at work and stuff, I really don't think it's for everyone. You really need to be strong because there's so much opposition to it in public.

It is interesting here that both students who attend Islamic schools, Laila and Hijira, wear the hijab and view it as a tool of empowerment. Naghma, who attends a Catholic school,

does not wear it and sees it as more cultural, something which her mom who is “old school traditional” wears, but not her. Zohal, who attends a Catholic school as well, did not wear it and talks about how her choice to not wear a scarf affects her friendships with other Muslim hijabis, “this one girl, she used to be my close friend...and then one day she just disappeared...she said that I was too White washed for her ‘cause she wears a scarf.” Serena did not comment on the hijab at all throughout the interview; she attends a public school.

Pride of culture and ethnicity

Similar to the role of religion in participants’ identity is their perception of the role their ethnicity plays in their lives. Participants’ ethnic identities became another salient theme throughout the interviews. All participants commented on the role which their ethnicity as Afghans played in their lives. The responses were all positive and, for the most part, demonstrated pride towards their ethnicity. However, some participants, including Naghma, express that their pride towards their culture waivers in contexts, such as school, where it is easier for her to try to “blend in” and be more like her peers. What she reveals is that pride towards one’s culture is indeed situational. At school when she is with her Italian Christian friends, it is convenient for Naghma to blend in and act westernized. However, at home or at an Afghan function, it is easier for Naghma to an Afghan Muslim. It is important to note that Naghma finds it easier to be herself, an Afghan Muslim, within the community setting because she is surrounded by others who are like her in terms of her ethnic, religious, and linguistic identifications.

Hijira commented on how proud she was to be Afghan, she stated “Pride. Full of pride. Nothing can knock us down, ever. Pride for our country, pride for our religion,

pride for our culture. Oh my God, we're like beaming with pride." However, Hijira was quick to point out that while pride was a good thing, it was also a negative characteristic to have because

we knock each other down because of it. Because we impose ourselves onto other people, like we don't mean it intentionally but we actually do put ourselves slightly above other people...other cultures...our pride gets in the way of us sometimes, we're supposed to be...humble people and sometimes it gets like that [pride].

Naghma too beamed when she discussed what she likes the most about being Afghan. Her response was along the same lines as Hijira's, "I like the traditions we have. We have some really cool ones. Like the dresses we wear, very pretty. The music, the dancing, how everyone is so family oriented fun and lively." Pride in the Afghan culture was echoed by Serena who stated that the best part of being Afghan was that "we look different, we don't look like every other person but you still can't tell where we I'm from. And I like going back to Afghanistan, I like that it is very cultureful [sic]." Laila and Ariana also commented on the food and culture of Afghanistan as being their favourite parts of being Afghan. As an insider and someone familiar to the culture and community, I wondered if the expressions of pride may have had anything to do with my own identity as an Afghan. It was difficult to assess considering at times these give demonstrated complex (often contradictory) responses to Canadian and Afghan culture. Due to the short interview lengths, I was unable to further probe and deepen my understandings.

Finding strength in resisting inaccurate ethnic stereotypes and portrayals

For Zohal, her Afghan identity represented not only pride but also strength. Moreover, just as Serena achieved strength in her ambiguous appearance, Zohal also stated that her identity gave her strength. However, for Zohal, this strength came in the form of fear because “as soon as people find out that you are Afghan, there is a lot of fear. They don’t really look down on you. It’s more fear.” For Zohal, it was important to distinguish herself as Afghan because if not, people who did not know where she was from,

[They]...just look down on you. They treat you like you’re immigrants. But when they do know you’re Afghan and you know you are Afghan, it is like you have a sense of confidence. Really strange, I guess it just gets me by every day.

Alongside confidence, her identity as an Afghan allowed Zohal to develop “stronger values than half these people,” and, as a result, Zohal comments that she ends up “walking around with my nose in the air. Not ‘cause I want to but because I can’t help but be like that.” Zohal also mentioned that her identity as a first generation Afghan ignited fear in others because it she was a threat to some of the preconceived stereotypes of Afghans. Zohal stated that fear from others is evident

When they look you up and down and they hear that you don’t have an accent and they see that you look normal and you’re well put together and you’re clean cut and they don’t understand. They’re just...they kind of expect to see a war struck person with an accent...or with a guy they expect to see a turban or a big beard.

Ariana also discussed her discontentment with the stereotypes that are associated with being Afghan. She refers to media portrayal of Afghans as terrorists,

What you see on television, how the media portrays Afghans as terrorists and all that...I don't like that cause it's not true...also how [media portrays] women have no rights in our culture- which they do and how women are forced to stay at home and cater to their husbands...which is not true.

Serena also expressed her frustration with the stereotypes of oppression and terrorism; she called them "stupid bomb jokes...oppressive jokes." Serena was very sensitive to these stereotypes and in how they affect her "especially since Bin Ladin was Arab not Afghan." Laila also commented how the stereotypes were one thing which upset her about her identity,

It is hard because I can tell the kids in my class that they are not true, but how do I tell everyone else in the world? It is hard to get the message out to everyone. Our society is being brainwashed by stupid messages that just cause conflict between people.

Hijira, who is also the only participant who wears a hijab, commented on the stereotypes people have about her hijab. She states,

some of the rumours you hear that people say about Islam are completely ridiculous. Like some people say, 'Do they force you to wear hijab?'...Some people think it's glued to our head. Other people think that we have no hair underneath. Others think that they shave our heads. Like you can't ever- all those extreme things you have to look into those...it makes you realize how much ignorance is out there...they don't mean it. They're just not educated about it...if someone is curious I just let them know that I'm friendly and I can answer your

questions cause I'm religious but not extreme in any way...everyone has a right to ask.

It is important to look at the intersections of religious and ethnic identity because of the direct influence they have on the overall identity of Afghan Canadians.

Afghan Canadian identity: Balancing or suppressing dual identities

According to identity theorist Phinney (1989, 1992), when youth enter early adolescence, they enter a stage in life where they learn to accept and internalize different aspects of their identity, including ethnicity, race, and religion. It is important to determine within the scope of this study, if participants have reached this stage and how subsequent identity negotiation unfolds. Through discussing ethnic and religious identity, it becomes clear that the participants represented very similar, yet distinct, voices. They all had similar beliefs on what Islam meant to them and their families, and on their pride towards their ethnicity. However, when it came to discussing whether or not they viewed themselves to be more Afghan or Canadian, almost all responses reflected a balancing act between both cultures. Both Ariana and Zohal commented that they viewed themselves to be equally Afghan and Canadian. For Ariana, she sees her identity as being balanced; at school she takes particular pride in being Afghan. When she is at home, she demonstrates her Afghan side more when she is communicating in her native language (Pashto) or helping her mother cook traditional meals.

Zohal too sees herself as being equally Afghan and Canadian. However at home, she considers herself to be,

So Afghan! We only speak our native language [Pashto], we only eat our native food, I don't like eating out, I don't like that kind of stuff. But when I am out, I

know how to balance it...I know how to socialize with those around me and not be too extremist in my culture or anything...I know how to balance it but I'll stay away from things like...eating pork and drinking, smoking, and those kind of things.

Along with the task of balancing dual identities, participants also shed light on the importance of having “multiple selves” which is developed in relation to the different contexts and situations they are in. This notion of “multiple selves” reveals the fact that some participants are required to suppress a large part of their identity in order to assimilate and blend in, especially at school. Participants state that they often have to downplay their “Afghanness” or their “Canadianness” depending on the context they are in. This relates to the importance of time, context, and space in youth’s identity development processes (Lerner, 2002, 2005). Participants expressed different variations of “multiple selves” in their responses. As Zohal states, one needs to “have multiple personalities because you can’t be the person I am at home ‘cause no one appreciates it at school.” For Laila, it is also important to have “faces for different people. For my parents and siblings and other Afghans, I have to be who I am- Afghan, and I have to be really good at it,” and at school,

I have to be balanced, because we have some really religious and strict Afghan people at our school, and they kinda have a bad reputation and unfortunately I don’t want to be compared to them just because I am from the same country, so I have to make sure I act neutral at school without seeming ‘too White’ or ‘too Afghan.’

Like Laila, Serena suppresses her ethnic identity in school, where she sees herself as “being more Canadian in comparison to all the Afghans there.” According to identity theorist Berry (1980, 1997), this is the process of assimilation where individuals place more value on the culture of the host country rather than on their own ethnic culture. Similar to Zohal and Ariana, this identity changes in her home and within the Afghan community where she sees herself as “being more Afghan.” At home, Serena demonstrates the process of *separation* by valuing her own culture and placing less importance on the dominant culture (Berry, 1980, 1997). Her Afghan identity is further evident at home because of the influence her native language, Pashto, plays. Serena becomes more “Afghan for sure” because her parents “talk in Pashto, do everything Afghan.”

A similar response was provided by Naghma, who prefers to views herself as someone that is

carry[ing] both traits. And both still very strong, but my Afghan traits would be more inside myself. Because I know myself, I am Afghan and know where I come from, and my beliefs and the way I am with my family or try to be.

Like the other participants, the concept of multiple selves is also evident in Naghma’s life where she acknowledges that it is important to suppress certain parts of your identity, especially

on the outside, if I want to get ahead in this society, to be honest you have to blend in with them, you need to be with them because you are now a part of this lifestyle and some people may take that as an offense... I think I carry [traits] both, on the inside is more Afghan and on the outside I try to kind of blend in.

However, when it comes to school, it becomes more crucial to be able to blend in and suppress her Afghanness because

that's when everyone around you is 'this' way so you have to try and act like you are [too]...not even act...well because I agree with them. Like they talk about things I talk about, they grew up here just like I did.

The balancing act becomes a struggle and source of frustration when Naghma transitions herself into her home life from school.

When you go home, your parents don't talk about that stuff [as with peers]. They talk about other stuff. Like the language changes and everything just...sometimes it's just too much because you have to juggle two different lifestyles. I guess being you know, was born here [Canada] but my blood is there [Afghanistan], but the outside is here, kind of split between two worlds. And honestly I think any kid in that position would be very stressed because it is hard.

However, Naghma states repeatedly that "when it comes down to it, inside I know I am a Muslim." In relation to youth identity development theorist, this affirmation refers to an achieved ethnic identity where Naghma has actively explored and accepted her identity as a female Afghan (Phinney, 1989, 1992).

While all participants expressed a struggle in suppressing a part of their identity to create a balance between both Afghan and Canadian cultures, the only participant who did not experience struggle is Hijira. She confidently and firmly states that she is "100% Afghan." This certainty about her identity roots in the role that her parents have played in her life. It is "easy" for Hijira to be Afghan because

it is sorta drilled into us, even if we say we feel Canadian initially inside we will always be Afghan and everyone will always see us as Afghans, Muslims, or something maybe, but definitely Afghan, because our culture sets us apart from every other culture. And Afghans have such a strong culture, like over the generations you cannot defeat it. You might get it to like falter a little but it will always be there and it'll be so strong inside you.

It is important to recall Hijira attends an Islamic school which may make it easier to assert her identity as a Muslim and Afghan. The influence of ethnicity and identity was described by participants as shaping their overall understanding of their personal identity. There were several important themes that emerged from interview questions focusing on the participant experiences in home, school, and the Afghan community. These experiences unveiled a series of important themes and concepts ranging from parental expectations, peer based discrimination, teacher-student relationships, and community interactions, that all have an overall impact on participants' sense of identity across the three contexts (see Table 2). Figure 4: *Complexities of living in two distinct worlds* provides insight on participants' narratives and the tensions that they experience in living an existence between spaces that are not necessarily congruent with one another. Participants express the difficulty in living in a world that is sanctioned by their parents on the one hand, and, on the other are living in the reality of the Western world. Both parental views and living in the West merge with one another. What becomes evident is the niche that participants create in the overlap of these two worlds. The following Chapter Five will attempt to make sense of these themes and concepts, while providing a better sense of understanding of the obstacles female Afghan Canadians experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapter One of this study, I stated that the purpose of this study was to investigate how a group of 6 Afghan Canadian female youth negotiate and develop their identity across three spatial contexts; home, school, and community. It is important to look at ethnic self-identification across these three contexts because ethnic self-identification involves “‘situational’ feelings of varying degrees” (Zimmerman et al., 2007, p. 770). In other words, time, place, and surroundings can all influence individuals’ feelings about their ethnic self-identification (Zimmerman et al., 2007). As such, I investigated the implications of home, school, and community on an individual’s ethnic self-identification. To get a better understanding of the diverse schooling experiences of Afghan youth, 2 participants each reflect three different types of schooling systems in Ontario; public, Catholic and Islamic schools. Chapter One provided an introduction to the study including the theoretical frameworks under which this study was conducted. These frameworks are a convergence of critical race, feminist, and youth acculturation theories. Chapter Two provided a brief literature review focusing on issues of identity in various youth populations. Chapter Three provided the methodological framework of this study, including how this study will be investigated within the framework of a qualitative case study. This study is based on one set of 30-45 minute open ended interviews with 6 Afghan female youth from Southern Ontario, with 2 girls each representing the different schools in Ontario (public, Catholic and Islamic schools). Once interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for member checking. Following member checking, interviews were analyzed and coded for significant themes and concepts.

Chapter Four gave an overview to the main themes and concepts that emerged from interviews with 6 female participants. These themes and concepts are categorized in the three specific spatial contexts of home, school and community. Within the context of home, significant themes that emerged include the influence that parents have on participants' cultural and religious identity and practices. Within the schooling context, themes that emerged from the interviews included teacher and classroom dynamics, the curriculum, and the influence of peer groups. Within the context of the greater Afghan community, interaction with other Afghans played a major role, as did a development of a sense of belonging within the community. Finally, under the overarching category of religious and ethnic identity, the influence of Islam and ethnicity, the hijab, and stereotypes emerged as significant themes across interviews.

In this chapter I attempt to make meaning of the themes that emerged from the interviews and make connections to existing literature if possible. Following a discussion of the results, I will highlight important implications for theory and practice, as well as implications for future research. Finally, this chapter will conclude with building connections between the research and my personal experiences within the scope of this research study.

Discussion of Results

As mentioned, the aim of this study was to investigate how young Afghan females negotiate their identities across three different contexts; home, school, and community. In Chapter Four, I was able to categorize the data into important themes and concepts as they emerged from the interviews. While there were many themes that emerged, I limited my selection to themes that directly related to the three contexts of my research. These

themes were (in paranthesis) organized by their spatial contexts of: Home (parental influence on culture and religion, parental influences on education, parents and gendered expectations, respect for parents and other community “parents”, family obligations); Schooling experiences (teacher and classroom dynamic, curriculum, peer groups and school culture, resistance and survival strategies, “Othering” due to ones religious identity, Westernization and friendship choices, tribal and linguistic differences); Community (interaction with other Afghans, sense of belonging within community). I have also included an overall category of religious and ethnic identity (influence of Islam, on wearing the hijab, pride of culture and ethnicity, ethnicity as strength, ethnic portrayal and stereotypes, Afghan Canadian identity: Balancing dual identities). The following discussion of results will follow a similar format in which I will discuss the findings.

Home

The experiences of participants in their homes are greatly affected by norms and traditions in most traditional Afghan families. Just as the participants in this study expressed respect and reverence towards parental authority in immigrant homes reinstates normative and moral obligations of minority youth towards their families (Fulgini, 1998). Across all interviews, participants expressed their Afghan identity reinforced within the home environment. As females, participants all shared similar roles in the house which ranged from housework, to helping their mothers and assisting in child care. Most importantly, all participants expressed their role as “role models” for their younger siblings. This role is similar in other immigrant communities where women are often the maintainers of culture and tradition (Khan, 1995; Kurien 1999; Maira 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001). Most immigrant women, including participants, share

the expectation that they will be not only the maintainers of tradition and culture, but they must pass it down to their own children (Kundu & Adams, 2005).

All interviews demonstrated the significant influence which parents have on their children's home life. Participants all stated that their parents have some degree of academic and cultural influence on them. This is congruent with other studies that demonstrate family as a significant source of support for minority youth (Kenny et al., 2003). Most participants support findings in other studies explain that despite the generation gap between youth and their parents, they were still able to acknowledge the importance of respecting their ethnic background and religion (Fuligni, 1998; Kwak, 2003).

Most participants reported some degree of parental involvement and preferences for friendships and social activities. Some of the participants even stated that parents would prefer that they be friends with other Afghans or Muslims rather than non-Muslims or non-Afghans. This preference is echoed in other immigrant identity studies such, as by Shaffir (1979), who finds that the continuity and preservation of religious identities was accomplished through isolating and distancing from "outsiders." Moreover, Shaffir states that many religious communities will put a lot of emphasis on isolating from the surrounding cultures in an attempt to avoid assimilation. The main purpose of isolating is to protect and avoid contact with individuals who have conflicting behaviours or beliefs (Fuligni, 1998; Shaffir, 1979; Zine, 2001, 2006). Some participants suggested this kind of dynamic when discussing their parents' preference for other Afghan or Muslim friends over non-Afghans or non-Muslims. Naghma describes the effects of this process as; "it is difficult living in a society where they [non-Muslims] outnumber us."

Most participants also alluded to the influence that parents played in their academic endeavors. Participants commented on the support and goals that their parents provide for them; aspirations of having a successful professional career. Such value on the role of education is significant in other immigrant communities. For example, a past research on Asian American academic achievement is linked to Asian cultural values that focus on the importance of education (Tseng, Chao, & Padmawidjaja, 2007). Some of the participants state that one of their main motivators for academic success is due in part to their parents. This is echoed by Louie (2001) who found that the academic success is one way for immigrant children to repay their parents for the sacrifices parents have made for them. This same study also found that parental experiences with discrimination and racism encouraged immigrant children to pursue higher education to gain better opportunities than their parents (Dugsin, 2001; Louie, 2001). Factors, such as respecting parents' wishes as well as ensuring a positive family reputation, were found to be considerably important in another study on Asian American youth (Okubo et al., 2007). These factors are especially true in interviews with participants as well as my own experiences and motivations with schooling.

Schools

According to Zine (2001), some of the most prominent experiences that Muslims encounter involve racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. It is within their experiences at school, Muslim's have multiple identities reflecting their race, class, gender, and ethnicity which they must negotiate (Zine, 2001). The various identities are then connected to much broader, interrelated systems of oppression (Dei, 1996; Razack 1998). Zine (2001) states that it is thus important to critically unpack and investigate how

these systems of oppression are related; a process which is part of antiracist education. Across the interviews, racism was a significant issue which came up across the different themes of teacher and classroom dynamics, curriculum and peer groups and school culture. It is the experiences with racism which drastically shape ethnic youths' identity development. The effects of racism and discrimination enable students to develop unique survival strategies which help them to overcome the barriers set up by peers and teachers. These strategies become emancipatory and enable all participants to become stronger, independent and more focused on their own identities.

Islamic schools. One of the most significant reasons why parents send their children to Islamic schools is because of their fear that their children will assimilate into a culture that is distinct from their own (Zine, 2001). This potential threat of cultural and religious identity is what shaped both Hijira and Laila's decisions for going to Islamic schools. Muslim communities are constantly challenging to survive and maintain their own self-definition and identity (Nyang, 2000). According to scholars (Khan-Cheema, 1996; Murad, 1986; Parker- Jenkins, 1995; Sarwar, 1996; Yousif, 1993; Zine, 2001), parents avoid sending their children to public schools, in efforts to maintain and protect their Islamic and identity (as cited in Zine, 2007). This is particularly true for both Hijira and Laila's parents. Based on the interviews with both Islamic school students, their schools are able to accommodate for a culturally similar environment, along with a more fluid transition between the values and beliefs at home to school. Unlike the experiences of participants in Catholic and public schools, participants viewed Islamic schools as being more capable of deterring racism and discrimination toward Muslim youth (see Murad, 1986; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2000, 2001). Theissen (2001) extends this

argument and states that ethnocentric and religious based schools enhance social harmony in a plural society where they engage in liberal democratic values within programs that are familiar to them, rather than learning democratic values and beliefs within an educational system that discriminates them. Furthermore, other studies on Muslim females in Islamic schools also find that females experience more positive “sisterhood” and teacher support and religious freedom (Haw 1994, 1998; Parker-Jenkins and Haw, 1996).

An interesting topic that came up from my conversations with Laila and Hijira was their relationship with other Afghans within their school. Both girls spoke of the linguistic differences in Afghanistan, and how their peer groups were often divided along these linguistic lines. In other words, as Pashtun females, both Hijira and Laila only associated with other Pashtun females. They did not associate with the Dari speaking females because of intra-cultural differences. This was an interesting topic that only these 2 participants brought up. Not surprising is the significant Afghan population at both their respective schools, which can provide more opportunities for differences within Afghans. Notwithstanding the tribal differences within their schools, both participants expressed their pride towards their cultural and, of course, religious identity at school.

Catholic Schools. It is important to note when discussing the experiences of female Muslim students in Ontario Catholic schools that no such known study exists which examines these unique experiences. Therefore, this analysis is one of the only available to my knowledge. As the interviews with Islamic and Catholic school participants demonstrate, the benefits of attending a religious or ethnocentric school is only evident if the religion or culture represented is similar to one’s own. Laila and Hijira

shared very positive experiences which reinforced their Islamic and Afghan identity; however, for Zohal and Naghma, attending a religious school that was different from their own religion was a struggle. Both Zohal and Naghma reported experiences of discrimination and racism; essentially ostracized from the majority of their non-Muslim peers. More alarming are their experiences of discrimination from teachers and administrative personnel. Both participants attribute this response to the fact that they were one of few visible and religious minorities in the school. However, despite the shared experiences of discrimination, in terms of how these experiences shape their perceptions of ethnic and religious identity Zohal and Naghma respond in two very distinct ways.

For Zohal, her response to the discrimination is a reaffirmation of her Afghan and Muslim identity. She becomes empowered by the resistance she experiences from peers and teachers. Zohal's reaffirmation of her identity is evident in her constantly defending her position in school as a religious and ethnic minority. Her strength is demonstrated in how she is unafraid to correct her teachers or peers, most times at the risk of further isolating herself from her peers. Zohal makes it a point to avoid assimilation into her Catholic school culture. She maintains pride for her own culture in her daily routines such as her resistance to participating in mass ceremony. Zohal reaffirms and states that she is Muslim first and foremost, followed by Afghan. Zohal's strategy is using school as a stepping stone to get ahead in life. Her simultaneous critique of the discrimination she experiences is also evident in other studies on minority females who use similar strategies (Lopez, 2002).

However, for Naghma who attends a similar White dominant school, the effects and experiences of discrimination have an alarming effect on her identity. Rather than trying to constantly reassert her identity with her peers and teachers, Naghma is more laid back and does not try to draw attention to herself. She assimilates easily with her peers, and considers herself to be “more Canadian” at school. Her identity as an Afghan and a Muslim are ignored while at school, and only when she is at home or within the Afghan community that she identifies as Afghan and Muslim. The differences in her perceived identity at school and home is termed as “home/school disarticulation” (Baker, 1997) and generally occurs where the norms, attitudes, and beliefs of one’s family differs from the educational system, resulting in an alienation between the student and their family from the school. While this is true in Zohal’s case, Naghma does not allow herself to become alienated from her peers, rather she alienates her identity as an Afghan and Muslim from her peers in exchange for social acceptance.

Public Schools. The experiences shared by both Serena and Ariana echo some of the concerns which Catholic school participants point out, as well as the benefits that Islamic school participants point out. Both Serena and Ariana complain about the lack of teacher knowledge on Islamic topics, such as Eid. Only Serena alludes to experiencing discrimination from one of her teachers, whom she describes as “rude.” Both participants also report mild forms of racism in the form of teasing, often jokes on stereotypes associated with being Muslim and Afghan. However, the benefit which Serena and Ariana have is that they attend a more diverse school with other Muslims and Afghans present. Unlike Zohal and Naghma, Serena and Ariana are able to pick and choose which peers they wish to socialize with. Although there are Afghans present at their school, both

participants reject the other Afghans due to linguistic barriers as most of the other Afghans are new immigrants and cannot speak English well. Although both participants do not associate with their Afghan peers, they do socialize with other Muslim and minority students.

The effects of attending a school with other minority students are mixed for Serena and Ariana. Serena considers herself to be more Canadian than Afghan when at school, especially in comparison to the newly arrived Afghan immigrants in her school. Yet for Ariana, she shows pride in her identity and considers herself to be Afghan Canadian at school. These differences in self-identification may not reflect the schooling environment as much as it would for participants in Islamic and public schools. This also seems to demonstrate a racism, fed by Canadian culture, against other Afghans who are not Westernized or Canadian enough. It seems that participants avoid interaction with non-Westernized Afghans because they want to avoid being associated with Afghans who are not as assimilated or integrated as them.

Afghan Community

According to Phinney et al., (2001), involvement within one's ethnic community allows for group members to spend leisurely time together. Furthermore, participation within one's ethnic community is integral in maintaining one's ethnic identity (Jurva & Jaya, 2008). Across my interviews, participants have varying levels of involvement with the Afghan community, the amount of leisurely time spent with other Afghans varied both within schools and in the community. While some are more involved in participating in community functions than others (Hijira, Laila, and Serena), all participants expressed how positive and content they felt while attending Afghan functions. All participants

stated that their presence within Afghan functions constantly reinforced their identity as Afghans. Researchers also state that involvement within one's ethnic community also provides an opportunity for members to create social connections and form friendships with other members of their ethnic group (Phinney et al., 2001). According to researchers, this association with one's ethnic community is associated with stronger ethnic identities (Xu et al., 2004). For Zohal and Naghma who attend Catholic schools and are not as exposed to other Afghans or Muslims, it is important for them to be connected to Afghan community functions in order to reassert their identities as Muslims and Afghans. It is important that community leaders and organizers take into consideration not only youth geared activities to engage youth, but also to ensure that they are able to accommodate those group members who are not easily accessible.

Zohal and Naghma both stated that it is difficult to engage with all the Afghan functions because of difficulties with the long distances between their homes and the GTA, where many of the community functions are held. Accessibility to an ethnic community is an important issue to consider because where connections with one's community are low, ethnic group members will be much more likely to form social networks outside of their own community (Breton, 1964, as cited in Jurva & Jaya, 2008). The negative impact of this can be seen in Naghma's interview where she states that because the majority of her friends are White, she views herself to be "more Canadian." The few times Naghma attends Afghan functions are exciting, yet rare glimpses of her Afghan background.

Overall Religious and Ethnic Identity

One of the questions that I asked participants was how religious they described themselves, either “religious,” “somewhat religious,” or “not very religious.” It is interesting that none of the participants selected the latter option. All 6 participants reported some level of religiosity. Naghma became very close to identifying herself as “not very religious,” however, she still described herself as being moderately religious. I should note the possibility that any hesitance in their responses may have to do with my own identity as a Muslim and the perceived notion that the participants did not wish to offend me. Despite the fact that there was variance in the degree of religiosity, it is necessary to reinstate the fact that Islam does play a role, however small, in the identity development process. In a study on European minority Muslim women, Silvestri (2011) found that participants were more “conscious of the meaning and challenges of adhering to their religion and of the possibilities this entailed for personal identity, agency and empowerment” (p. 1243). Furthermore, Silvestri concluded that for these women, regardless of their religiosity, “the faith of the heart was more important” (p. 1243). It is important to note that despite the variance in religiosity, all participants in my study expressed that they identified themselves as Muslims first in all contexts; home, school, and community. This identification is consistent with other research on American Muslim youth who identify themselves by their Islamic faith first (Naber, 2005). It is also consistent with Otterbeck’s (2011) study that found religious identification as Muslims to be important regardless of the degree of religiosity. Furthermore, this is consistent with other research on Muslim youth who describe themselves “as members of a transnational, trans-ethnic ideal religious community, rather than of national, ethnic communities”

(Schmidt, 2004, p. 34). In other words, being Muslim appears to be far more important than being Afghan or Canadian. While I did not investigate the issue of religiosity further, it surfaced continuously. Catholic and Islamic school participants referred to the importance of practicing Islam in their daily lives through practices such as wearing the hijab or fasting during Ramadan or practicing modesty. The importance of Islam is echoed in other feminist literature on Muslim females. For example, Silvestri found that many Muslim women use Islam to seek personal empowerment through an intimate and conscious guidance to the principles of the Quran and in learning Arabic. Through educating oneself on Islam, women use the teachings to contest male leadership and challenge traditional status quo “from within” Islam (Silvestri, p. 1231). This is an important skill considering Muslim women are “traditionally socialized into becoming the transmitters of religion” (p. 1231).

For the participants involved in this study, all 6 expressed an achieved ethnic identity regardless of home, school, or community where they had explored and accepted their ethnicity and religion (Phinney, 1989, 1992). Factors, such as personal and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), depending on the environment also played a role in their identity negotiation across the contexts. What participants chose to do with their identity varied amongst one another as according to Berry’s (1980, 1997) modes to cultural acculturation. Some participants decided to forgo their own ethnicity and assimilate by adopting the majority culture, while others preserved their own culture while withdrawing from the majority culture (separation), and others were able to integrate into both cultures successfully (integration). None of the participants expressed a marginalized strategy, losing cultural contact and identification with their Afghan culture

as well as the Western culture. It is interesting that these identifications vary for some participants depending on what context (home, school, or community) they are in.

I was surprised to see that all participants expressed that they considered themselves to be Afghans first in both home and the community. This is consistent with Berry's (1989) separation mode of cultural acculturation where participants try to preserve one's culture while withdrawing from the majority culture in the home and community. In fact, participation within community events as well as conversing with parents and siblings reinforced the importance and value of their Afghan identity. It is within the schooling context that participants' identity as Afghans became questionable and participants either assimilate and value the majority culture over their own, or integrate by valuing and integrating their own culture with that of the majority (Berry, 1989). Islamic school students stated that they were Afghans first, and, in fact, their school environment and culture reinforced their pride for their Afghan identity. They did not report any discomfort or discrimination whatsoever as Afghans within their school. They did report the formation of cliques with other Afghans belonging to the same linguistic tribes as their own (both Laila and Hijira are Pashtuns), and segregation from non-Pashtuns.

For public school students, both Serena and Ariana developed a healthy sense of identity, although they experienced some discomfort in the stereotypes their peers associated with Afghans and Muslims, and subtle discrimination from teachers, both participants stated that they were proudly Afghan Canadians. Both Serena and Ariana were able to integrate into the Canadian and Afghan culture at school. Zohal and Naghma reported extremely hostile and racist experiences at their respective Catholic

schools, the effects of which created two very distinct results. For Zohal, the racism and discrimination she experienced as a result of her ethnicity and religion encouraged her to further embrace her identity as a Muslim and Afghan, causing her to separate from the majority culture. She manages to develop an extremely positive attitude towards herself and her community; in fact she considers herself to be “more Afghan” than most of the Afghans she knows.

However, unlike Zohal, Naghma is affected in an entirely different way. Rather than embracing her Afghan identity, Naghma assimilates herself into the dominant culture, she considers herself to be more Canadian at school because she is a product of Canadian society, having been born and raised in Canada. As her friends are all White and non-Afghan, Naghma explains the stress she experiences in having a dual identity. The struggle that Naghma experiences is echoed in research by Al-Jabri (1995) who refers to the *split personality syndrome* in reference to youth who struggle between an identity that restricts them from certain practices (alcohol, dating, etc.) and a social identity which includes peer pressure promoting engagement in these practices. The end result is a conflict between a persona developed for the home and community which refrains from these habits, versus a second persona specifically developed for school and social circles (Zine, 2001). Such a situation often leads to confusion and dissonance amongst youth (Zine, 2001). It is only when she is at home or at community functions that her Afghan identity takes precedence.

Across all interviews, participants’ identities were influenced by the different environments and people within the environments. Across the home, school, and community, persons such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, administrators, and

community members all influence the participant's identity negotiation process. According to researchers, persons can either be "brokers" who help individuals or "gatekeepers" who hinder the identity negotiation process (Phelan et al., 1991). These persons either create difficulties for individuals or support them throughout this process (Phelan et al.).

Implications for Theory and Practice

All participants stated that in terms of the home and community environment they shared a strong sense of Muslim and Afghan identity. It is only within the schooling context that a participant's identity becomes under question. More specifically, it is only within the public and Catholic schools that participants begin to question their identity due to influences from teacher practices, school administration, the curriculum, and peers. Not surprising is that students in a non-Eurocentric schooling system do not experience any form of discrimination or racism from peers, teachers, or administrators. Therefore, what becomes evident is the problematic Eurocentric schooling system on a participant's identity development and negotiation process. The following section will describe necessary implications which this research raises based on the experiences of participants in Catholic and public schools. These implications involve a revision of Ontario's curriculum and multicultural education and investigation into teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards diverse identities.

Ontario Curriculum and Multicultural Education

Unfortunately, Ontario's formal curriculum is unable to grasp concepts of ethnic diversity or to contribute to the shifting and multiple identities belonging to immigrant and minority youth. Hebert, Wilkinson and Ali (2008) argue that the problems are

particularly evident as Toronto receives almost half of all immigrants who come to Canada. Unsurprising is the result that curricular responses are more necessary in Toronto in order to facilitate the role of the school in being conducive to ongoing integrative processes of new and second generation immigrant youth. According to the same researchers, schooling experiences play a vital role in the successful integration of all generations.

The curriculum is an important tool for teachers and it can be very useful in especially diverse classrooms if used properly. Marshall (2002) argues that a lack of cultural diversity in the curriculum of formal education minimizes the opportunity for students of diverse backgrounds to participate effectively in the learning process and, furthermore, reflects on an atmosphere of educational inequity

Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Diverse Identities

An important issue that the narratives highlight is the missed opportunities for learning multicultural education in the classroom. When Naghma attempts to correct her teacher on Islam, the teacher rejects her offer and continues an erroneous lecture. What becomes evident is that the teachers are ignoring the expert knowledge the students have of their own communities. These missed opportunities for learning may liberate Muslim students and provide them with an opportunity to be validated in the classroom, however, they are unable to become valued members of the class. They are silenced and their potentials are undermined.

According to Banks (2001), educators must “develop reflective cultural, national and global identifications” (p. 5). Educators must first do this for themselves if they plan to help students become “thoughtful, caring and reflective citizens in a multicultural

society” (p. 5). As Ladson-Billings (2006) states, “our responsibility to the students who sit before us extends well into the future, both theirs and ours” (p. 41). Marshall (2002) too argues that so long as school systems and teacher training colleges do not incorporate multicultural perspectives, then diverse populations, such as Afghan youth, will remain vulnerable to institutional racism and bias. It is no surprise that one of the reasons why some ethnic/minority children have so much trouble academically is that many teachers lack the ability to create classroom practices that will fairly accommodate more than one culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zine, 2001, 2002, 2006). This is an issue which the participants in my study also pointed out.

Egbo (2009) recommends that teachers (and administrators) should initiate praxis by examining their own identities and subjectivities before working with children, especially in an ethnically diverse setting. Such self-knowledge is an important prerequisite to understanding the basic life experiences of others, such as their students or even co-workers. When teachers are able to confront the origins of their own beliefs about other cultures, they most likely will be able to overcome any personal biases that are based on stereotypes rather than from culturally inaccurate information (Dodd & Irving, 2006). While this self-exploration should take place at the preservice level, veteran teachers can also benefit from taking professional development workshops related to multicultural education. Egbo suggests self-directed transformative learning where teachers are encouraged to initiate praxis through critical self-reflection. Egbo recommends the Teacher Diversity Awareness Compass (TDAC) which encourages “self-directed transformative acting involve[ing] the development of a series of action plans for changing the “self” and for empowering, and thereby improving the life chances

of, students from marginalized communities” (p. 132). Egbo also suggests other activities that can be used to encourage self-understanding and diversity awareness. For example, teachers can participate in workshops that focus on reducing prejudice or perhaps even read diversity related texts or materials to broaden their own horizons (Egbo, 2009).

Powell, Cantrell and Adams (2001) argue that despite the recent trends of multicultural and diverse education initiatives, many school texts are still mono-cultural in their presentation of knowledge. This will also send messages about the superiority of some groups over others. Educators must carefully select texts that represent nonmainstream groups in a positive light (Henson, 2001).

If school systems and teacher training colleges are unable to incorporate multicultural perspectives, diverse populations will struggle and remain vulnerable to institutional bias and discrimination (Marshall, 2002). In fact, some ethnic and minority children struggle academically due to the fact that their teachers are unable to effectively create classroom practices that will equally accommodate more than one culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This was also an issue that the Catholic and public school participants brought up numerously. Brown (2008) also highlights the importance of school as a strong influence on the survival mechanisms of immigrants and their children. In particular, she mentions the lack of curriculum choices that teachers have which adequately reflect the classroom. According to Brown, the “curricular choices leave teachers ignorant of and unprepared to deal with traumatic stories of slavery, colonization and political domination, whether historical or contemporary” (p. 378). Brown further elaborates and states that in order to fix this, what is necessary is a critical

multiculturalism that studies and examines the history of abuses and trauma, accommodation, and resistance of the embodied subjects who inhabit the contemporary multicultural society, within classrooms and workplaces (p. 386).

Egbo (2009) suggests that teachers become reflective practitioners who can react to situations of discrimination or bias in their classrooms instinctively. However, administrators must also be able to deal with sensitive issues of discrimination and bias immediately as they occur (Egbo). Teachers and administrators must be equally prepared as they both share leadership roles that are being carefully monitored by students.

Samuels' (2004) study on 40 minority students found that all students had experienced racism in interactions with peers in different contexts. While most students reported that they were able to continue with their academics, some students expressed that they would alternate between feelings of visibility and invisibility throughout certain academic and social settings. Students from both contexts revealed the type of negative impact these situations had on them; they reported that their self-esteem and confidence were undermined. Some students even stated that it affected them to the extent that it negatively impacted their academic performance. Such results are especially distressing taken into consideration the amount of empirical research that warns us of the ill effects of racism on school achievement. Within the framework of my research study, some of the participants expressed the distress they felt towards some subjects based on their teachers' attitudes towards them. Banks (2001), for example, states that "all students- regardless of their gender and social class and they ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics- should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (p. 3).

Moreover, a research study on Muslim female students in public schools found that assumptions of oppression at home and inferiority in Islam (as women) were communicated through the hidden curriculum and through low teacher expectations (encouraging Muslim females to pursue nonacademic streams; Zine, 2001, see also Rezai-Rashti, 1994). The evident risk associated with low teacher expectations lead to negative evaluation and biases in student assessment, as well as underachievement and loss of academic motivation by the students (Gibson 1988; Parker-Jenkins, 1991, 1995; Zine, 2001). In the case of Naghma and Serena, both experienced negative attitudes from teachers which had an effect on Serena's academics and Naghma's identity as an Afghan and Muslim. Both Naghma and Serena are silenced.

Importance of Multiculturalism Education

As the study by Samuel (2004) demonstrates, the academic setbacks which students of colour experience from prejudice and discrimination by their teachers and peers is too prevalent to ignore. The stories some of the participants, specifically Zohal and Naghma, shared regarding their experiences with racism from peers and teachers draws concern to the effectiveness of the practices in place. Antiracist education needs to be started at an early age. As socialization theory states that children acquire their attitudes from their family and from peers, according to Sleeter and Grant (1994), it is important to infuse multicultural curriculum programs when teaching children about various diversities. It is vital that multicultural and antiracist education begins when children are young because, according to Banks (2001), if children can learn negative prejudiced attitudes, then presumably they can also learn positive attitudes towards diverse ethnic groups through the same mechanisms (peers, parents, teachers, etc.).

Quintana and McKown (2008) suggest that school-based programs are most likely to be successful in reducing peer-directed discrimination.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of 6 Afghan youth as they negotiate their identities across various contexts of home, school, and community. Through interviews with the participants, it becomes evident that both home and school nurture and encourage a positive self-identification as Afghans and Muslims for these females. However, interviews demonstrate that within schools, particularly within public and Catholic schools, identity development and negotiation becomes a struggle. While this study only investigated the experiences of 2 females per school type, it would be beneficial to further investigate this issue with a larger sample of participants from each school type.

As previously stated, this research is significant given the lack of literature on Afghan youth in the West, specifically Afghan females. While there does exist significant research on Muslim youth, it is important to avoid branding all Muslims together as sharing the same experiences and identities. This is especially true “given the diversity of national origin, race, class, gender and generational identities among young Muslim Americans” (Leonard, 2005, p. 476). Moreover, it is important to avoid attaching “panethnic labels” to all Muslims regardless of their national origin, race, gender, etc. (Leonard, p. 476). Therefore, as this is the only known research study on Afghan females, there is a significant gap in literature. More research needs to be conducted that investigates the different experiences which Afghan females encounter, especially within the Canadian schooling systems. As this study only looked at experiences of Pashtun

females, future research studies should ensure that the experiences of diverse ethnic and linguistic Afghans are represented.

While some research exists on the experiences of Muslim females and males in public and Islamic schools, no known research exists which investigates the experiences of Muslim females in Catholic schools. Future research should also investigate issues of Afghan youth identity development on a longitudinal basis so as to investigate how the identity negotiation and development process throughout the high school years, and what, if any, effects the process has on academic performance. Future research should also investigate the experiences of parents and community leaders in their contributions to positive youth identity development. More specifically, what type of parental practices are enabling youth to have positive and/or negative identity outcomes should be investigated. Lastly, any future research on Muslim females should recognize the importance of identifying and comparing issues that are significant to Muslim women “rather than imposing issues onto Muslim women” (Silvestri, 2011, p. 1235). In other words, future studies should forefront the voices of Muslim females on their everyday lives, rather than asking women to discuss predetermined issues for them (i.e., Islamophobia, oppression).

Reflexivity and Personal Connections

In Chapter Three of my study I stated that I would make use of field notes and analytic memos. I have consciously left out my field notes and analytic notes for a specific purpose; so that I may engage my notes with my personal reflections. As I analyze my notes, there are two very significant things that stand out in all 6 interviews.

Firstly, all participants were very eager to start the interview. Throughout the preinterview processes, I found participants were very excited and curious about the interview. It became evident to me the amount of *importance* that participants were attaching to their role in my study. When I had asked participants for parental consent, the forms were returned to me within a week's time. More evident of their eagerness to be participants were in person mannerisms throughout the interview process. Most participants arrived early for the interviews; only 2 were a few minutes late. Participants were very formal towards me at first; however, after a few minutes of building a rapport, I found that they were a little less formal and more forthcoming.

Secondly, nearly all participants were dressed up, as if for a job interview. Their attire signaled to me that they took their role seriously as informants of the experiences of Afghan youth. While it is inaccurate to use the voices of a few to represent an entire ethnicity, for the participants, they felt they were responsible for telling me what goes on during their home, school, and community life. What becomes more interesting is that Zohal, Naghma, and Hijira (Catholic and Islamic school students) came prepared with some form of "checklist" of things they would not forget to tell me, either written on a piece of paper or stored in their cell phones. I had distributed a set of questions to them prior to the interview, therefore, I wondered if they had rehearsed their answers prior to the interviews. Taking into consideration participants' keenness, eagerness, and preparation for the interviews, I realized the importance that these young women placed on being interviewed. Such keenness is echoed in other research studies on Muslim women, such as Silvestri's (2011) study where she found that participants were keen to participate "because they perceived the study as an opportunity to redress distorted public

images of Islam and of ‘oppressed Muslim women’ ...an opportunity to help improve the plight of immigrants in society and to address the problem of discriminations” (p. 1238).

Along the same lines, not only were participants in my study quick to point out the stereotypes and misconceptions of Islam, but also Afghan women. Once again, such a response to having their voices addressed and documented sheds light on the importance of conducting research on a silenced and marginalized group. One result of this is that Islam and their lives as Afghan women were presented as relatively positive, rather than as a complex mix of experiences, perspectives, and feelings.

While my interviews gave the participants an opportunity to air their grievances with their schooling experiences, or to express their pride in faith and ethnic identity, it enabled me to accomplish two very important tasks. First is the important task of needing participants’ experiences! I cannot talk about experiences of Afghan female youth without talking to Afghan female youth. Secondly, and most importantly, this process allowed me to understand my own experiences. At the onset of my research study, I situated myself within the context of this study. As a female Afghan Canadian, I have shared many experiences that have shaped my identity as an Afghan and a Muslim. I hoped to investigate this issue so that I can see if other Afghans experience the same obstacles that I did, and how, if at all, they dealt with the obstacles. What I found towards the end of my interviews was an overwhelming feeling of affirmation. Through the experiences of the participants, I heard not only my own voice, but the voices of my siblings and Afghan friends. Through the hopes, fears, struggles, and goals the participants shared with me, I felt validated. I shared very similar experiences in my

home life to that of the participants, I had very similar responsibilities catering to the needs of my siblings and parents.

It amazed me that the participants not only shared a similar traditional Afghan upbringing, schooling experiences were very similar to mine. This is with the exception of Laila and Hijira whose experiences attending Islamic school made me envious. The warmth and support that Laila and Hijira experienced from teachers and peers were a stark contrast to the subtle terrorist jokes and stereotypes that I experienced. Speaking in terms of the participants and personal experiences, while Islamic schools do have their own setbacks, there is a lot which public and Catholic schools can learn from Islamic school administrators in how to encourage a positive and tolerant learning environment. While I was not happy to hear of the racism that Zohal, Naghma, and Serena experienced, it was a necessary reminder that these issues are not just limited to my own experiences; these issues are salient with many others. While I was listening to their experiences, it initially saddened me to hear of the struggles that these young women experienced. However, after seeing and hearing of their strength and the different tools of resistance these girls were using, I become extremely happy and proud of them. These are not weak, young women. These are strong, young women who have set important goals for their immediate and long term future. I consider myself lucky to hear their voices and experiences and be able to write about it in a way to encourage other youth and researchers into investigating their lives and experiences further.

It became clear towards the end of my research that while I and most of the participants were lucky enough to have a strong support system at home helping us to survive the racism and discrimination we experience at school, others may not be as

lucky. It is crucial to understand the negative impacts which racist and intolerant attitudes have on young persons' identity negotiation and development process. It is important that we revisit our curriculum and our preservice teaching training curriculum to ensure that teachers and administrators are aware of the issues that minorities experience.

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Appendix A

General Interview Questions

Participant school type: Public, Catholic or Islamic?

1. Why did you choose to go to a Public/Catholic/Islamic school?
2. Would you say you are particularly religious?
 - a. Very religious
 - b. Moderate
 - c. Not very religious
3. What are your favourite classes/subjects?
4. Have you discussed Islam or Muslims in any of your subjects?
 - a. If so, do you remember what you talked about?
 - b. Do you remember how you felt? Happy, shy, embarrassed, indifferent?
5. Do you have any plans after you are done high school?
6. Do your parents have any expectations for you when you are done high school?
7. What is a typical day like at home?
 - a. What are your responsibilities at home?
 - b. Do you have any siblings?
8. What is a typical day like at school?
9. What do you most or least about school?
10. What is the best part about school?
11. Do you have any other Afghan students at school?
 - a. Do you hang out with them during school?
 - b. What do you guys usually like to do? Mall, movies, food, etc.?
12. What, if anything, do you like most about being Afghan?
13. What, if anything, do you least like?
14. Do you see yourself as more Afghan or Canadian?
 - a. Does this change when you are in different settings?
15. Are you active within the Afghan community? Do you go to the functions?
 - a. If so, how do you feel when you are at them?



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Appendix B

Research Ethics Board Clearance Letter

DATE: 11/11/2009

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB) 

TO: Michael O'Sullivan, Education
Tabasum Akseer

FILE: 09-052 – O'SULLIVAN
Masters Thesis/Project

TITLE: Identity formation and negotiation of female Afghan youth in urban Ontario

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of November 11, 2009 to May 1, 2010 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/forms> to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/mb