SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH IN THE CANADIAN DIASPORA:

MEDIA INFLUENCES ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT FROM

HOLLYWOOD TO BOLLYWOOD

by

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Abstract

This study explores identity construction for first-generation South Asian youth growing up in the Canadian diaspora. Attention is placed on the influence of competing medias in shaping hybrid or dual identities that blend the home and mainstream cultures. This study takes particular interest in what is *not* being represented. The images of South Asians portrayed by Western media and Bollywood characterize only a slice of the South Asian population, homogenizing an heterogeneous group of peoples. This study explores the effect that the homogenization process has on South Asian-Canadian youth that are misrepresented in Hollywood and unrepresented in Bollywood through a phenomenological examination of lived experience through autoethnography.

Cette étude explore la construction d'identité de la première génération des jeunes de l'Asie du sud qui ont grandi dans la diaspora canadienne. L'attention est établie sur l'influence des médias qui font concurrence pour modeler les identités hybrides ou doubles qui mélangent le pays natal avec les cultures traditionnelles. Cette étude s'intéresse en particulier à ce qui *n'*est *pas* représenté. Les images des sud-asiatiques représentées par la média occidentale et Bollywood dépeignent juste une partie de la population sud-asiatique, ce qui homogénéise un groupe hétérogène de personnes. Cette étude examine l'effet de l'homogénéisation sur les jeunes sud-asiatiques qui sont mal représentés à Hollywood et non-représentés à Bollywood à travers un examen phénoménologique des expériences vécues par autoethnographie.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

She stared into the mirror at the eleven-year-old girl looking back at her. Her eyes searched the features of the image before her, scanning upwards from the chin of her oval-shaped face, to the plump lips, straight nose, bony cheeks, big eyes, and bushy eyebrows. She paused there, not wanting to go further but couldn't help it - drawn to the small dark mole in the middle of her forehead.

"PAKI DOT!"

The words resounded in her ears and stung her again as she flashed back to the girl at the school playground that teased her today. She was pretty – blonde hair, blue eyes, white skin. The insult hurled in passing without reservation.

She stared at the mole - looking curiously at its location exactly in the middle of her forehead. She wondered if God had stamped her with a permanent indication of her Indian identity – as if her dark brown skin that she also despised wasn't indication enough. If only there was something that she could do to erase this mark that labeled her a Paki, forced her to endure teasing at school, and made her feel different. If only she could make it go away or disappear.

She had an idea.

She winced as her nail dug into the skin, tearing and scratching at the mole's surface. She inched closer to the mirror, excited at the possibility of shedding a part of herself that made her feel different from the rest - a difference that was now in her control and slowly disappearing with every stroke of her finger and scrape of her nail.

She wiped the trickle of blood that escaped the spot where the mole had been. It stained her skin like the kumkum powder from prayer time. The girl in the mirror smiled; her prayers had been answered. The mole was gone. Things felt different now. Things would be different now.

I remember this day clearly. What I perceived to be unique is actually an experience shared by many people; the desire to shed one's skin for something else is a common story told throughout the generations. Looking back, my physical appearance had not changed. I still had the oval shaped face, the plump lips, straight nose, bony cheeks, big eyes, and bushy eyebrows. But somehow, I felt like I had taken a step closer to fitting in and to looking like everyone else. At eleven-years-old, I did not have the capacity to articulate how being an ethnic minority in Canada made me feel like my birthplace simultaneously was and was not my home. The feeling of belonging was intrinsic in the birth certificate that I owned yet I was made to feel the need to shed my parents' history in order to be accepted. The marginalization that I felt as a young girl growing up in Toronto during the 1980s and 1990s persuaded me to take action and remove a part of me

as insignificant as a mole on my forehead, in order to be one step closer to what I

considered to be 'normal.' The aftermath of my actions was met with humour

mixed with surprise amongst my parents and family members. They knew how

the mole made me feel like an outsider and perhaps understood it as erratic pre-

adolescent behaviour. But this determined resolve to be something that I am not

continued to haunt my childhood up until my adolescence. These collected

experiences throughout my formative years of development have led me to my

current area of research and interest, which centres primarily on the following

question: What does it mean to feel foreign in one's country of birth?

Many individuals from the various diasporas in North America likely face

this question sometime in their lives. For first-generation South Asians, born and

raised in Canada, the experience of being stuck in-between two worlds is a feeling

that is becoming increasingly prevalent. Not fully Canadian and not fully South

Asian, first-generation youth must negotiate their identity on a daily basis,

wearing different shoes and drawing upon different sets of cultural knowledge

depending on whether they are at home or at school. Identity formation is largely

constructed by these two influential spaces, where the home is typically

represented by Eastern "traditional" values and the school is typically the site of

Western "modern" values. The clash between home and host cultures position

South Asian youth in a liminal space between conflicting values and ontologies. I

am interested in uncovering my own history which is much like other South Asian

youth that I have come into contact with. In order to do this, I have spent a lot of

time thinking about what it is like to be a South Asian first-generation youth living in a state of hybrid identity.

Why a study of identity? Scratching the surface of one's identity is the first step to discovering what is beneath. As an emerging scholar, to paraphrase a popular cliché, I am finding myself at the beginning of my academic life. I must turn to my own past, uncover the hidden memories, and remember my lived experience. To turn to what I know is a comforting starting point because I am an authority on my own life and I am attempting to emerge as an authority in the academic world in an area of study that still requires exploration. I have undertaken to explore South Asian dual identity and not simply Indian dual identity because I want to avoid swallowing the diversity of the South Asian subcontinent into one singular Indian experience. I believe that my personal experience as an Indo-Canadian is not unique to individuals from India. The feeling of being an 'Other' can be shared across languages, religions, places of origin, and shades of skin. The experience of being "brown" is one that does not attempt to erase difference but rather to create a community of individuals of shared experience.

Why study identity when it has already been done? South Asian identity in the Western hemisphere and Western media is grouped as a whole and is understood in general terms as Indian. The diversity of nations that compose the South Asian subcontinent, its cultures, religions, languages and ways of life are categorized as one group – the Other. These are the shared experiences, histories, and origins that are ignored because they are veiled by the colour of brown skin.

Much like the experience of East Asian peoples in being grouped entirely as "Chinese" to Westerners, South Asian people are commonly grouped as Indian. This grouping is problematic in many ways but specifically, in assuming that not only are all South Asians the same, but also that all Indians are the same. The Western representation of "Indian" is a homogenized image that is largely North Indian Punjabi or Gujurati, borrowed from the images represented through the popular Indian cinema known as Bollywood. I am intrigued by the study of identity when it comes to uncovering these complex layers. I wonder what this homogenization of identity means for South Asian youth that are not even Indian, Punjabi or Gujurati. For those that are Indian like me, how can we define ourselves as "Indian" when the images we see do not represent the languages, cultures, and religions that we know to be Indian from our lived experiences? There are cinematic influences that surface from various sources like South India and Pakistan; however, these movies are not a part of the mainstream Western discourse. The existence of dark Indians for Western audiences is kept in the dark.

As the South Asian diaspora in Canada increases, the issue of dual identities impacting the development of South Asian youth and adolescent identity development becomes important to address. The terms of the conflicting values these youth face surround issues of parenting techniques, familial ties, and gender role differences (Umana-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006). Many South Asian youth living in Canadian society share the common experience and understanding of having to abide to traditional cultural values and practices while

entrenched in Western culture. The dual cultural influences position South Asian youth in a liminal space between two cultural identities – Eastern and Western – that often conflict in terms of values and ontologies (Radhakrishnan, 2007). This cultural collision results in the pressure (from both family and the adult community) for South Asian youth to maintain their historical cultural roots in a Western climate that is often disconnected from these traditional values. Like the story of the mole, this thesis is my attempt to scratch the surface of my life.

The mole was gone but she had only scratched the surface of questioning her racial and ethnic identity.

As I uncover my dual identity as a South Asian-Canadian, there are some questions that haunt me. What is it like to be a South Asian first generation youth living in a state of hybrid identity? What is it like to see images of South Asians in the media and not relate? What pedagogic influence do the media have on the development of South Asian adolescent identity? How do representations of South Asians in Eastern and Western media influence first generation youth in constructing their hybrid identities? These questions swirl in my mind like the oil that pools at the top of a pot of curry. They relate directly to me and the experiences of many South Asian youth that I have met throughout my lifetime. My research has led me to attempt to uncover some of these questions while leaving me without answers at the same time. A lot of work has been conducted on the diasporic subject by South Asian and Western scholars around the world.

The perceived lifestyle created by Bollywood cinema of upward mobility, elite social status, and the American dream has created a particular image of the diasporic subject. However, what is left out is how these images do not represent the heterogeneous South Asian community made up of people from several countries, languages, religions, social statuses, classes, castes, physical features, *ad infinitum*. I turn to my own lived experience and that of my family and friends to make sense of these musings.

Framework

Isn't a thesis supposed to have some sort of formal research with research subjects, interviews, transcriptions, statistics, analysis, graphs, and definitive answers to a problem? When I began my work, I was clearly living in the positivist framework that surrounds many graduate university programs. I began to explore the qualitative research methods, focusing on autoethnography, autobiography, and phenomenology. What does this methodology look like? Flipping through the theses and dissertations in the McGill library, I had a difficult time finding work that shared this methodological framework. The majority of work that I found in Arts-based fields followed a more traditional method of research. There were graphs, statistics, and interviews. The use of the first-person or even the existence of stories and memories was a rare sight. What I came across was impersonal, cold, and factual.

I realized that these theses could not help guide me in directing my frame of study. The lack of direction made me concerned with the content of my autobiography. What would I talk about? While I teach my students about the

importance of reflexivity, I have never really examined the stories of my life through a critical lens. In fact, I have not thought about the instances that have shaped me into the woman that I am today. When I began to think back to these moments that have defined my cultural identity, I have realized that they have profoundly influenced the social being that I have become. I began making connections between my past and present experiences that relate to the deep-seeded anxieties that I have felt growing up Indian in a Canadian landscape. The embarrassment of eating Indian food at school, smelling like curry, or wearing Indian clothing in public still carry their marks on my life and are the result of growing up culturally Indian but nationally Canadian.

From this perspective, I employ a phenomenological approach to the study of hybrid identities. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena from the first person perspective. It is the study of lived experiences and gives validity to researching personal experiences as the subject matter for knowledge production (Creswell, 2003). It pursues, "a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). The questions that phenomenological research asks are related to what a particular experience is like. This type of questioning is important because I ask myself what it feels like to be culturally Indian and nationally Canadian.

As Van Manen (1990) notes, "From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p.4). The experience of living is important in the research process in order to come to an understanding of

the topic of study. Phenomenological research is different from the traditional

methods that I encountered in the theses at the McGill University library. Instead

of beginning with an experiment that leads to a conclusion, phenomenology

begins in the experiences of individuals and daily life. Phenomenological

research, unlike the experimental nature of natural sciences, does not provide a

theory to apply to all life situations; instead, "it offers us the possibility of

plausible insights that brings us in more direct contact with the world" (Van

Manen, 1990, p.9)

Van Manen (1990) believes that reflecting on one's past through writing is

of extreme pedagogic importance. The reflections on my childhood and the

experiences that I have had in my daily life are the subject for my research and

have led me to formulate conclusions about hegemonic power and knowledge

production. Before I looked back at my own life, I failed to realize the

importance that being an ethnic minority had in shaping the person that I am

today. Phenomenology has allowed me to realize the validity of these

experiences. From this perspective, I am studying the influences of the media on

South Asian adolescent identity development; the conflicting factors of home and

western values and the impact these values have had on identity development

from my own personal experiences. Phenomenological research questions require

that the individual posing the question "live" and "become" the question (Van

Manen, 1990, p. 43). I live and become my research questions by exploring them

from my own lived experience. As I relive each moment, the event takes on new

meaning upon critical reflection and examination. I will weave my personal

narrative throughout my exploration of dual identities to produce my autoethnography. Autoethonography is a style of writing that fits with the phenomenological approach to research as it connects the author's personal story to aspects of their culture (Maguire, 2006). The author's life becomes the site for research, which is what I will do in this body of work. The narratives that weave throughout this work will encourage a critical examination of the diasporic experience and act as a catalyst for examination of not only what *is* but also what *is not*.

As a teacher, my interest in this subject comes from a critical pedagogical perspective. Critical pedagogy is deeply concerned with understanding the viewpoint of where and how power works in society and its institutions. Steinberg (2007) explains it as "theoretically-based scholarship, grounded in the understanding of the origins and underpinnings of power within society and in the fabric of schooling" (p. ix). It examines the intersections of power, pedagogy, and politics and the affect these areas have on the lives of marginalized peoples. To reveal the politics of power, critical pedagogy names the owners of privilege that possess power over "reason, rationality, and truth" as "white, male, class-elitist, heterosexist, and imperial" (Kincheloe, 2007). Therefore, when I refer to power relations in my study, I mean the relationship between the dominant (white, male, heterosexual elite) and the subordinate 'Other.' Because critical pedagogy focuses on unjust practices, it is not afraid to name these practices and the people that participate in the subjugation of the disempowered. It allows for a space to not only critique but also to take action and fight injustice. Thus, critical pedagogy

employs *praxis* – the amalgamation of theory and practice in order to raise awareness and promote change.

By engaging in theory, a critical pedagogy provides individuals with the necessary tools to fight injustice, basing the fight from an educational perspective. Providing access to a critical education involves making power accessible by recognizing its existence and influence on our everyday lives. Critical pedagogy creates a space to address the impact of power relations on individuals' lives and allows people to become critical agents of change (Giroux, 2007). The freedom to question and to name injustice is as central to critical pedagogy as is the practice of being skeptical of such narratives as those about citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism that we have been taught in Canadian schools. Giroux (2007) further explains:

> Critical pedagogy is not simply concerned with offering students new ways to think critically and act with authority as agents in the classroom; it is also concerned with providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary for them to expand their capacities both to question deep-seated assumptions and myths that legitimate the most archaic and disempowering social practices that structure every aspect of society and to take responsibility for intervening in the world they inhabit. (p.2)

The origins of the study emerged in the 1960s out of Brazil through the works of the scholar and educator, Paulo Freire, and through the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany (Kincheloe, 2007). Freire's 1967 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* seated in the relations of power and education, inspired scholars

in the Western world to question teacher education and classroom practices to uncover the "stupidification" (Macedo, 2006) of educators and students. The twenty-first century is now concerned with issues of asking provocative and uncomfortable questions to challenge existing educational practices and the results that these practices have on students and teachers. Kincheloe (2007) asks questions that relate to my own concerns for South Asian Canadian youth educated in Eurocentric curriculum and classrooms:

> How do schools operate to validate or challenge the power dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, indigenous/aboriginal issues, physical ability-related concerns, etc? How do such processes play out in diverse classrooms located in differing social, cultural and economic domains? How do the knowledges schools and other social institutions choose to transmit replicate political relationships in the larger society and affect the academic performance of students from dissimilar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds? What roles do diverse media play in the ideological education of societies? (p. 13)

These critical pedagogical questions can easily be read from the perspective of South Asian-Canadian youth. The importance of how schools support or disservice individuals that occupy a marginal position in society, like South Asian-Canadians, is important to my study of identity because schools are the site in which a student spends their formative years. Also, in my study, schools represent the site for dissemination of Western culture in contrast to the traditional culture taught in the home. Kincheloe's (2007) question of how schools

participate in transmitting the knowledges that undermine ethnic minorities is important for South Asian youth in their identity development as the South Asian identity formed by Western media does not fully represent what they can identify as their own lived experiences. The importance that the media plays in developing ideologies and the tendency for the schools to replicate the politics of representation in schools may bring harm to not only identity development as I have highlighted, but also to academic success, as Kincheloe suggests.

Critical pedagogy, while addressing the insidious nature of power, is primarily concerned with human suffering (Kincheloe, 2005). It seeks to reveal the sources of suffering and to alleviate inequities in education and society. While it is never static (Steinberg, 2007), critical pedagogy always returns to its concern with eradicating inequity because inequity is a phenomenon created and maintained by empowered peoples for the benefit of a few at the expense of many. Kincheloe (2007) explains this point further, stating the need to understand "that education is always political as it supports the needs of the dominant culture while subverting the interests of marginalized cultures" (p. 14).

Critical pedagogy informs my work as an educator because of this very concern for the interest of marginalized cultures and peoples. The need to eradicate the systems of power that function to remain in power is important to the South Asian-Canadian community and to dual identity development because of this feeling of being made an outsider in the country of one's origin. My desire to shed my physical markings as an Indo-Canadian can be traced back to my feelings of inadequacy in school, which were made to replicate feelings of South

Asian inadequacy practiced in the political public sphere that my parents have felt as immigrants in the 1970s. When my parents moved to Canada in 1976 as a newly married couple, my father was shown the door at every job interview he applied for. His bachelor of commerce degree, masters in commerce, and bachelor of law degree had no value in Canada. Moreover, he lacked "Canadian experience," a common story told by many immigrants over the last thirty years since my parents migrated here. In order to obtain employment, he had to lie, claiming that he had only a high school education because he learned from previous attempts that he was "over-qualified" for the jobs he applied for. Two years of unemployment and my dad succumbed, like many before and after him, to accept a position beneath his qualifications in order to survive.

My parents' story is what makes the basis of my work in critical pedagogy important. Critical pedagogy is not merely about what *is*. It is about what *isn't* (Steinberg, 2007). It is about the stories that do not get told. It is about the young girl in the mirror, staring at her image and wishing she was different. It is about exposing the stories of people on the margins. It is about giving voice to the narratives deeply hidden in our unconscious. It is about validating the lived experiences of people and striving for change.

What lies ahead.

This work is divided into five chapters. The first chapter has introduced my motivation for exploring my identity and that of South Asian Canadian-youth from a phenomenological perspective based on the foundations of critical pedagogy. The second chapter will delve into the history of South Asian

migration to the West and the formation of the South Asian diaspora in Canada.

The third chapter will explore the nuances of dual and hybrid identities for South

Asian youth living in the Canadian diaspora. It will examine the experience of

being both Canadian and South Asian in terms of values, parenting techniques,

and feelings of alienation. This chapter will also explain the concepts important to

a study of South Asian identity – such as hybridity, ethnic/cultural identity, youth

diasporic identity, and the influence of Bollywood on the development of these

areas of study. The fourth chapter is a response to chapter three from a personal

perspective. My personal experiences as a South Asian youth in a state of

hybridity are told through narrative memories and personal experiences. Through

autobiography, I attempt to reveal the difficulties of occupying this liminal space

and I ask questions to provoke thought on what *is* to reveal what *isn't.* The fifth

chapter concludes my experiences and takes a look at some of the questions that

have nagged me throughout my life and as I began my research. As a critical

educator, I reflect on the importance of understanding the South Asian experience

with the proliferation of South Asian immigration to Canada's urban centres. I

offer suggestions as to how critical pedagogy can assist educators in

understanding dual identities as important not only to South Asian youth but all

marginalized youth.

Chapter 2 – What is a diaspora?

Diaspora

Interactions between people across the globe historically have been attributed to the trade of commodities, warfare, conquest, and the transmission of religion (Appadurai, 2003). Trade among Asian peoples along the Indian Ocean, and eventually with European nations is an example of cultural interactions across time and space. Warfare and conquest (sometimes connected to the transmission of religion), further encouraged the contact between racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic strangers. Over time, the spatial distances began to dissipate, and individuals made personal contacts through migration – forced or voluntary. Appadurai (2003) states that this shift resulted in "an overlapping set of ecumenes… [emerging], in which congeries of money, commerce, conquest, and migration began to create durable cross-societal bonds. This process was accelerated by the technology transfers and accelerations of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (p.27). The increasingly global nature of today's society has resulted in migration and the creation of ethnic and cultural pockets emerging outside of the places of origin – what is known as the formation of the modern day diaspora.

The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek: 'to disperse' and refers initially to the Jewish peoples (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). The Atlantic slave trade was responsible for the creation of the African diasporas across the world. One of the largest migrations in world history, the slave trade forcefully took Africans from the continent to countries throughout the western world,

specifically Europe and the Americas. The dispersion of peoples resulted in the formation of ethnic communities outside of the place of origin. For indentured labourers or former slaves, these communities provided protection and belonging, a shared sense of community and history from the intolerant reach of the European colonists.

Modern historical uses of the word diaspora now include other migratory groups - including South Asians. The migrants leaving India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and the Maldives islands have moved to countries in Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Canada, United States, UK, and Fiji and so forth. Various estimates place the South Asian diaspora at roughly eleven million people (Mishra, 2002; Brown, 2006). Once a quiet presence, South Asian cultures have exploded onto the global cultural scene. Like the scent of freshly fried onions, South Asian cultures have infiltrated the senses of individuals around the world wherever a South Asian diasporic population exists. Countries are being introduced to the colourful sights, the intoxicating smells, and hypnotizing sounds of South Asian culture.   Growing up in the Canadian South Asian diasporic culture, I have seen shifts occur in the urban centres where South Asian culture existed only in whispers. When I was young, South Asian cultures were visible in the small Indian grocery store in a run-down strip mall with a movie rental section; the glimpse of sequins on a colourful bordered outfit covered by an oversized winter jacket; the whiff of curry drifting through an apartment hallway; and the sound of the *tabla* carrying through the walls from a neighbour's place.

Since I am a product of European cultural hegemony and have done my research based on a Eurocentric framework, I realize that I have come to understand the South Asian diaspora from a colonized perspective; however, the evidence of South Asian migration prior to the nineteenth century is overwhelming. Lal (2003) explains that evidence exists of the patterns of trade and migration along the Indian Ocean as early as the twelfth century. However, the mass dispersal of peoples occurred largely in two waves known as classic capitalism and late modern capital (Mishra, 2002).

South Asian diaspora: Classic capitalism

The South Asian diaspora across the world was created in two distinct time periods. The first wave of migration out of the South Asian region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was stimulated by British colonization of the West Indies, African nations, and Fiji (Brown, 2006). These regions brought on the migration of indentured labourers to produce rubber, sugar, and tin in the wake of the abolition of slavery and the growing need for cheap labour (Mishra, 2002). Indentured labour emerged in the 1830s as a means of replacing former slave labour. The worker entered an agreement to work for a set amount of years in exchange for low wages along with room and board (McMahon, 1995). Their work included long hours of harvesting crops on the plantation. Brown (2006) outlines that few of the ex-slaves remained on the plantations to continue work as free, paid labourers. This predicament left the crops un-harvested and resulted in the immediate need for workers. While recruitment for indentured labour came from various sources, the majority were provided by the Indian subcontinent

(Brown, 2006). Between the years of 1834 and 1917, 1.5 million migrants left India to enter contract work across the British Empire and especially in Mauritius, British Guiana, Natal and Trinidad (Brown, 2006). The migrants from the first wave were largely working class and often experienced assimilation into their new lands. They created the first South Asian diasporas; in so doing, they lost their connections to the homeland (Uberoi, 2006). The percentage of returnees to the homeland was marginal subsequent to the end of the labour contract partially because of their newly formed communities but also because of the distance felt from their homelands.

South Asian diaspora: Late modern capital

The second wave of migration arose in the 1960s, with South Asians migrating to countries across the globe for economic and refugee purposes (Mishra, 2002). The second waves of migrants are referred to as NRIs, or, Non-Resident Indians and are viewed, for the most part, as upwardly mobile and successful in their home countries (Mishra, 2002). The assimilation experienced by the first wave of migrants has yet to fully impact the second wave, as many migrants to the UK, Canada, United States and Australia still have ties to the languages, traditions, religions, and cultures of the motherland (Uberoi, 2006). Mishra (2002) argues that the connection to the homeland arises from the rejection of full participation in the diaspora and marginalization that migrants experience:

> First-generation NRIs desperately try to hang on to values that mark their difference from the rest of the nation-state. These differences are

generally about tradition, continuity, family, and, often, the importance

given to arranged marriages. A diasporic imaginary thus grows out of a

sense of being marginalized, of being rejected outright by nation-states.

(p. 236-7)

For South Asians that migrated to the Middle East in the late twentieth-century, the inability to assimilate due to rejection by their new nation-states is prominent. The economic boom in this energy rich area of the world resulted in an urgent demand for labour to fuel the growing industries. A wealthy native population averse to labour work led to the boom of South Asian migration to the Middle East for labour, skilled labour, and professional work from the 1970s onward (Brown, 2006). For many of the migrants, the goal was not to remain in the Middle East but to earn money in order to return home to a better life in South Asia:

> Most were young unmarried males, and there were very few women
> among their number because there was little employment for women in the
> region, and the objective of most male migrants was to earn high wages,
> save as much as possible for remittance back to South Asia, and eventually
> to return home. (Brown, 2006, p. 52)

The desire to return home marked these immigrants as distinctly 'Other' and solidified their identity as South Asian instead of Middle Eastern. Moreover, the Middle East is not considered a diaspora because of the inability for individuals that are not of Middle Eastern descent to gain citizenship in the Gulf countries. As

well, it is not a true diaspora because fewer families migrate there in comparison to other diasporas in Canada or the United Kingdom (Brown, 2006).

Two of my cousins migrated from India to the Middle East. Their experiences speak volumes of feeling like second-class citizens in their country of employment. Both cousins migrated in order to earn money that was unattainable in the small city of Cochin, India. The lure of being paid for work as an engineer that would support their families at home along with their extended families was enough to draw them to the dry heat of Kuwait and Dubai. My elder cousin came without his wife and children, who preferred to stay at home and take care of my aunt and uncle. The younger cousin lives with his wife and young daughter in a two bedroom apartment that he shares with another Indian family – reminiscent of the joint family style of living that he left in Cochin. The stories of being spit on in the street and feelings of being a stranger in his daughter's country of birth are a different experience from my own. I too have felt unwelcome at times, but never unsafe. I have always known that Canada, not India, is my home; but I cannot say the same for my cousin's young daughter who was born in Dubai but retains her parents' Indian citizenship. The Middle Eastern diasporic experiences for South Asians are different from that of the first-wave indentured labourers and second-wave skilled workers that moved to British colonies and the West. The first-wave of migrants lost touch with the homeland; the second-wave that arrived as skilled workers retained a sense of nostalgia for home; while the Middle Eastern migrants know that they can never truly call their place of birth or long-term residence "home." When my cousin visited Canada for the first time, he

marveled at the integration of the Indian communities in Toronto and enjoyed the clean air, natural greenery, and sense of belonging that my family enjoys as an established immigrant family. His desire to live abroad brought him to Dubai for financial gain but draws him toward the Canadian experience of living between two worlds. He prefers this existence over the outright exclusion and contempt that he sometimes feels in his current situation in Dubai. Whether he finds what he is looking for in the Canadian experience is for the future to hold, as Canada is far from the welcoming nation that it claims to be.

Canadian context

South Asian immigration into Canada occurred as mentioned above in two waves. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Canada opened its doors to immigrants from South Asia for the purpose of obtaining cheap labour. Many of these migrants were Indian males of Sikh origin who settled along the west coast of Canada for ease of passage back into India (Minhas, 1994). The national railroad was being constructed and the primary industries were booming, which resulted in an influx of potentially dangerous work that could be filled by migrant workers. Thus, as Burnet and Palmer (1988) outline, 5000 South Asians arrived in British Columbia in the first decade of the twentieth century.

The influx of migrant workers shook the foundation of white British Canadian society. Fears associated with the 'Hindoo' migrant workers taking jobs away from white Canadians (Jensen, 1988) led to the creation of legislation that would effectively bar entry into Canada for immigrants from South Asia. The government, backed by public support, constructed the legislation to avoid

appearing overtly racist. Without specifically banning South Asian immigrants, the government created the Continuous Journey Provision legislation of 1908. This law stated that immigrants may enter Canada if their voyage was met without stopping prior to reaching Canadian shores (Prashad, 2000). If they did not arrive here by continuous journey from the place of origin then the Canadian government may deny them entry (Bolaria & Li, 1988). The inability to arrive by ship to Canada by continuous journey from India resulted in the near elimination of South Asian immigration to Canada subsequent to the 1908 legislation. The ramifications of this legislation were felt by passengers aboard the S.S. Komagata Maru, a ship holding 376 Indian citizens mainly of Sikh origin. In 1914, the ship traveled from India, stopping over in Hong Kong and landed on the west coast of Canada where the ship and its passengers were held and prevented from docking. After two months aboard the ship awaiting legal proceedings to unfold, the passengers were ordered by the Supreme Court of Canada to return to India (Basran & Bolaria, 2003). This event was the last attempt at immigration from South Asia for another fifty years.

The 1960s reopened the doors to immigration from South Asia. The second wave of migration occurred when the immigration laws relaxed in the face of a growing need for labour (Brown, 2006). A merit-based system was introduced in which individuals were allowed entry if they met specified criteria that deemed them fit for all aspects of Canadian society. The changes in immigration policy reflected a shift in some Canadian values that began to demonstrate growing intolerance for overtly racist practices alongside the Civil

Rights Movement in the United States of America. The Trudeau era of multiculturalism and narratives of tolerance in the 1970s further made Canada a desirable place for immigrants around the world and especially from South Asia. The myth of meritocracy and tolerance drew thousands of immigrants from the South Asian subcontinent to Canada in this second wave of migration settling and expanding the diaspora; however, as Mishra (2002) notes, "the dreams of wealth are often tempered in the new diasporas by the rise of a neo-racism even as the nation-state redefines itself through an idealized project of multiculturalism" (p. 236). The 1970s and 1980s drew many immigrants from South Asia to North American shores and into Canada. Unlike their early twentieth century counterparts, these new immigrants were often professionals from the middle-class, which shifted the South Asian image from dangerous 'Hindoo' to 'model minority' (Uberoi, 2006).

The couple stood close together shivering in the cold but with a sense of nervous excitement. The woman pulled her coat around her tighter, hoping to trap what was left of her body heat but it was no use. It was the winter of 1978 and the sun just started to set but they wouldn't dream of leaving yet. Not until they at least caught a glimpse.

The crowd around them began to form, slowly at first but increased as word spread throughout the building on Sherbourne Drive. The man stamped his feet on the ground to shake off some of the snow that began to

collect. He ignored the tug on his sleeve from his wife, knowing that she wanted to leave. He had to be there. He had to thank him.

He looked down the street and thought he saw a dark car approaching them in the distance. He squinted, batting his eyelashes against the flakes of snow that sought to distract him. The crowd began to buzz with excitement as someone in the crowd shouted, "It's him!"

The car stopped in front of the crowd on the street and the door opened. Their first glimpses of him as the door opened were in parts. First a leg, then another, and finally the whole man as he stepped out of the car.

"Pierre Trudeau!"

It was Trudeaumania at Sherbourne Drive and Ontario Street. He walked up to the crowd with his famous grin and charismatic personality – shaking hands and patting a baby on the head. He approached the couple and shook hands with them heartily. The man leaned in so Trudeau could hear him.

"Thank you!"
"You're welcome! For what?"
"For bringing us here."

My parents' experience meeting Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that day in 1978 is a story that is still told when drawing up old memories. They had recently moved to Canada as a young couple and despite battling new elements like Canadian winters, lack of access to employment, and the occasional Paki insult, they loved their new home. The model minority status protected them from overt racism, though it worked insidiously in my father's inability to obtain employment in his field.   Nonetheless, the South Asian diaspora in Toronto, though small at the time, ensured that they felt welcome. At that time, the mix of religions, languages, cultures, and places of origin of the South Asian community kept them in touch with Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians from India and Pakistan. The community was not large enough to subdivide. As the years progressed and more immigrants flocked to Canada, the eventual divide along religious, cultural, territorial, and even caste lines began to create new pockets within Toronto's diaspora. As a young girl, I recall being a part of a larger South Asian community where we would celebrate festivals from regions that I had never heard of at that young age. Eventually, we moved on to community groups from Kerala, the state in India where my father was born. The *Onam* festivals and Hindu rituals at *Vishu* are strong memories in my mind. The once small diaspora expanded and multiplied into mini diasporas within the larger network. Today, there are groups in most of the large ethnic centres from Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Pickering, and so on.

As a teacher, I marvel at the youth growing up today. The thought of bringing leftovers of last night's dinner to school for lunch was implausible for

me at that age. The looks and stares that I would get if my mom packed me rice

and chicken curry would have been enough to ensure teasing for at least one

week. Today, I see students not only eating *roti* at lunchtime but also sharing their

food with non-South Asian classmates. This experience that I witnessed may not

occur in every classroom in every school in Canada. I recognize that the level of

comfort that these children have with each other likely has to do with the fact that

the school was located in a densely populated South Asian community in

Brampton, Ontario, which is known to hold one of the larger Sikh communities in

Ontario. Nonetheless, the expansion of the South Asian community in other

urban centres of Canada has changed the face of interactions between the Euro-

Canadian communities and the South Asian communities. I am not suggesting

that difficulties do not exist for South Asian youth in the mainstream society; I

can see shifts in acceptance from something that was once unacceptable in my

school years to what the youth face today.

One facet of diasporic life that has not perceivably changed for first-

generation youth is the battle between Canadian mainstream values and the

traditional values that parents bring with them from their childhood. The values

that individuals living in the diaspora adhere to depend on a variety of factors:

place of origin, religion, era of emigration, and propensity to assimilate or not are

three factors that play an important role in the values an individual brings to the

diaspora and disseminates to the next generation. Brown (2006) notes that

changes in India amongst Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, and Christian groups are rapidly

occurring amongst many families; however, the attitudes of rural Muslim groups

from Pakistan and Bangladesh are rooted in conservatism toward female actions and freedom. The values of the country of origin are transported to the diaspora though, as Brown (2006) highlights, it is necessary to take into account the timing of the migratory flow as important to whether the practices will be respected in the diaspora. Migrants that left during unchanging times often hold onto the conservative values, whereas migrants that have left during social change or come from urban backgrounds have negotiated the change in family relations (Brown, 2006). Therefore, the ability to change in the diaspora is dependent on the period in which the migrant left. Changes that occur on the subcontinent do not necessarily travel to the diasporas, as many émigrés try to retain the past in the face of a changing future. Brown (2006) concurs, stating, "as the pace of social change on the subcontinent quickens, it may become the case that South Asians there will prove more ready to change than their diaspora relatives and counterparts, who feel the need to retain distinctive social values in the face of the wider society" (p. 88-9). The need to maintain values that make them distinct is a unifying trait for South Asians living abroad. It helps connect the individuals living abroad to each other while also sharing a new identity forged in their new shared space abroad (Brown, 2006).

Chapter 3 – South Asian Dual Identity Development

In the following chapter, I will explore important issues in South Asian dual identity development. It is important to understand the nature of the conflicting Eastern and Western values alongside a study of identity, in order to grasp issues that disturb many first generation and immigrant South Asian youth. Parenting is another conflict for South Asian youth, as youth may feel that parenting techniques contribute to the feelings of alienation from the home and host cultures.

Values

From my perspective, values are the beliefs and commitments that people follow in order to live their lives. Values are often related to morality and can be inspired by religious, cultural, or territorial influences. A person's values may differ from the mainstream values of the community in which they were raised, despite having been educated in accordance with that community's particular way of life. It is important to note that values are subjective, and not always followed. Levels of adherence may differ from person to person, and the manner in which a person lives his or her life may be different from what he or she believes to be right or wrong. Societal pressure to think and act a certain way can place strain on individuals in terms of feeling forced to think and behave according to the group norm. I will discuss South Asian values in relation to mainstream Western values. It is difficult to group all South Asian and Western peoples into a particular set of beliefs; however, I do so in general terms.

South Asian values differ from Western mainstream values in distinct ways. In many South Asian cultures, an importance is stressed on familial and community relations that are unlike the values of individualism espoused by Western culture. Umana-Taylor, Bhanot, and Shin (2006) identify the values South Asian families maintain while immigrating to North America. They cite the common values as: adherence to patriarchal systems and traditional gender roles, the importance of family, and collectivism. South Asian families often stress the importance of developing an ethnic identity when living in the diaspora as a necessity in maintaining the cultural heritage (Brown, 2006). The implications of this pressure from the community for South Asian adolescents are significant, as youth are forced to begin understanding their identity as not only part of a collective ethnic background but also tied to the culture that they encounter in school and mainstream society. The conflict of South Asian values and Western mainstream values is essential to Buchignani (1980), who explains that mainstream Canadians may show ignorance to South Asian culture and values. This ignorance results in South Asians tending to separate and distinguish themselves from mainstream society. Buchignani (1980) demonstrates how the two cultures clash and suggests that ignorance of the South Asian experience by mainstream culture is a factor in this alienation. Alienation from the mainstream community demonstrates how South Asian youth identity becomes polarized because of the dueling values that are set apart in distinct ways.

Dual identities

Emerging from the clash of values between traditional South Asian cultures and mainstream Canadian/Western culture is a theory of South Asian adolescent dual identity. I define dual identity as the hybrid ontologies and epistemologies that define an individual rooted in two cultures. The concept of dual identity has been researched by a growing number of scholars that have identified its emergence and the conflicts involved. For example, Ibrahim, Ohnishi, and Sandhu (1997) define dual identity as emerging from a social-cultural context that is both Western and Eastern, identifying the factors that impact the identity as: "the larger culture, specific ethnic group of origin, community, religion, type of neighborhood, social class, educational level, gender, sexual orientation, and stage of development" (p.34). The various factors that affect identity are magnified when they are based on two separate value systems: traditional South Asian culture and Western values.

Identity is not static (Rutherford, 1990); it is constantly in flux and changes depending on influences from other cultures and on life experiences. In our increasingly global world, homogeneous societies are being introduced to new cultures, values, and beliefs. Immigrants to Canada arrive with a distinct identity but the forces of assimilation and acculturation often lead the individual to adopt the values of the mainstream culture. Kim (1980) and Kurian (1992) illustrate the impact of acculturation on immigrant parents and their children, illustrating how the parents tend to hold on to the cultural values more rigidly than the immigrant kids who, due to influences at school, adopt Western mainstream culture in order

to fit in. Kim (1980) discovered that immigrant adolescents tended to assimilate to the host culture quicker than their parents due to the shorter period of time spent in the country of origin. Like South Asian adolescents, the level of assimilation is related to the distance from the values of familial and cultural relations. Kurian (1992) confirms that intergenerational conflict between parent and child is not specific to South Asians but is consistent with many traditional cultures. He states that adolescents are, "Torn between two cultures, with parents trying hard to keep them away from the American influence of their peer group, Indian children may tend to go a step beyond their friends in an effort to 'prove' themselves" (Kurian, 1992, p.119). Kurian illustrates an important reaction of parents and children in this quote, stating how traditional South Asian parenting techniques attempt to control youth interaction with the mainstream culture in order to prevent complete identification with an opposing value system. Youth, on the other hand, may rebel from parental control because of their investment in mainstream society. Therefore, conflicts in dual identities rest not only on differing values but also on parenting.

Effects of parenting

Many South Asian youth in Canada struggle as they feel pressure to conform to Western society and the pressure to maintain the cultural heritage of their South Asian community. Value conflicts and lack of understanding between immigrant parents and immigrant or first-generation children are magnified by parenting techniques. A focus on parenting styles as a key factor leading to identity confusion in South Asian adolescents living in the diaspora is necessary.

Maiter and George (2003) describe South Asian immigrant parenting styles as authoritative, which conflicts with the mainstream Canadian value of liberal parenting. The authors suggest that South Asian parents justify authoritative parenting in the belief that children must respect and listen to their elders who have the child's best interests in mind. As well, the authors outline how parents describe their desire for their children to maintain their culture and avoid the perceived negative influences of Western mainstream society. Furthermore, attempts to control and restrict youth participation in romantic relationships occurs, as it runs counter to traditional South Asian values revolving around the practice of arranged marriages. Maiter and George's (2003) work provides a possible answer as to why South Asian adolescent identity is caught in between two worlds: the parents authoritatively instill the values of the home culture such as repressing participation in romantic relationships, which conflicts with the relative freedoms in Western culture.

Youth responses to parenting techniques confirm the authoritative nature of South Asian parenting; but instead of sympathizing with parental desire to maintain the traditional culture, the youth reveal feelings of frustration as an outcome of perceived repression. Talbani and Hasanali (2000) obtain the youth perspective on parenting techniques through interviews with South Asian female adolescents in Montreal. The respondents shared their frustrations with the South Asian authoritarian parenting style that appears to limit opportunities for socialization by restricting social interactions, preventing attendance at parties, and restricting mixed gendered encounters. Like Maiter and George's

conclusions, Talbani and Hasanali (2000) show how the conflict between the traditional and Western culture is magnified for these youth in the area of romantic relationships where severe restrictions are placed, especially on South Asian females, with respect to contact with the opposite sex. This practice is counter to the values of mainstream society where dating is often accepted and normalized. Thus, youth raised in traditional South Asian settings, experience alienation from their parents who do not accept dating and from the mainstream society due to their restricted participation in Western culture.

Alienation

It is evident that one reason for alienation from the traditional home culture is because of authoritarian parenting in the Canadian context; however, Bagley (1987) illustrates how mainstream society also contributes to the feelings of alienation. Bagley (1987) and Brown (2006) argue that South Asian youth, born in England, understood their identities in terms of both mainstream and traditional cultures much like youth in the Canadian setting. Due to overt racial tensions in England, the South Asian British youth tended to be alienated from mainstream culture and associate themselves with the cultural traditions of the East rather than with the individuals of Western culture that discriminated them. Bagley (1987) posits that Canadian youth would not have the same difficulties in negotiating their identities because Canadian identity itself is in the process of discovery; however, Bagley's findings that Canadian youth would not face an identity crisis is inconsistent with the literature on South Asian dual identity. In fact, it is documented that South Asian youth in Canada face psychological effects

related to the pressures of conformity stemming from both the family and mainstream society. Abouguendia and Noels (2001) have identified that pressures for South Asian youth to conform to either Eastern or Western value systems can affect youth attitudes, therefore, resulting in isolation and alienation from both cultures. These authors surveyed new immigrant adults and first generation children with respect to adjustment in Western countries, while examining whether daily pressures would contribute to the psychological development of the groups. Abouguendia and Noels (2001) discovered that a difference exists in the acculturation experiences. Children face more hassles from the traditional community if they are perceived to have assimilated to the mainstream, which results in lower self-esteem for South Asian youth and increased alienation from the traditional community. If they do not assimilate, they experience hassles from individuals in the mainstream community. Therefore, South Asian youth experience alienation regardless of their choice of allegiance to either community. My personal experiences relate to these findings. As a young girl I was not Indian enough nor was I Canadian enough. The question of whether I am Indian or Canadian haunted me as a child before I realized that it was possible to occupy a dual or hybrid state. This, unbeknownst to me at the time, was a factor that interested me in the topic of identity and what the different layers of identity mean.

Identity

Identity is a difficult concept to define. Many people may not know how to respond to the question: "Who am I?" as it is asked by academic and non-

academic people alike. A simple attempt to discuss my understanding of identity

begins by asserting that identities are socially constructed based on socio-cultural

interactions and the environment in which an individual engages. Because of the

social aspect of identities, they exist in close connection with culture and, as

Stuart Hall argues, they "cannot 'exist' outside of cultural representations" (as

cited in Barker, 1999, p. 31). Thus, the manner in which a culture is represented

has an impact on the development of an individual's socially constructed identity.

This concept of identity is important to grasp when considering the role culture

plays in the lives of South Asians across the world because of the pressure from

the South Asian community to conform to traditional ways of life over pressure

from Canadian society to be more Western to fit in. For diasporic subjects, it may

be easier to think about identity as Barker (1999) frames it: "we do not *have* an

identity; rather, we *are* a multiple weave of attitudes and beliefs" (p. 31). Instead

of being either South Asian or Western, Barker argues that individuals can

embrace the multiple influences to construct his or her identity. Thus, the

importance that diasporic subjects place on South Asian traditional culture and

values is important to a young person growing up in the diaspora with multiple

and conflicting values bombarding him or her.

Identities are fluid and tentative. They are not static processes, nor do they

already exist as an innate part of the individual (Rutherford, 1990). Identities

develop and change according to social circumstances and have the ability to

become multiple or fragmented. Stuart Hall's (1992) postmodern reading of

identity argues a decentred self in which shifting and fragmented identities exist

and the postmodern individual experiences multiple, sometimes conflicting identities. Thus:

> The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continually being shifted about. If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story of 'narrative of the self' about ourselves. (Hall, 1992, p. 277)

My understanding of identity is articulated from the works of scholars like Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha. Bhabha plays upon Hall's notion of multiple identities in his concept of hybridity.

Hybridity

As a diasporic subject that identifies as having a dual or hybrid identity, my understanding of hybridity is that it is a liminal space where multiple, potentially conflicting identities come into contact. For South Asian youth living in the diaspora, hybridity is especially important as Western culture and values often clash with traditional Eastern upbringings, placing youth in the middle of often opposing ways of life. The hybrid state is one that exists in the space between, where one is not fully Eastern or Western, but fragmented pieces of the different influences woven together to create something completely different. The Canadian diasporic subject that tries to discover who he/she is often finds that he/she is South Asian, but *not South Asian enough;* Canadian but *not Canadian enough*. He/she is both and neither – living in an uncertain and in-between space

that must be negotiated daily based on the social circumstances that one finds oneself in. Rutherford (1990) argues that our identities are formed within the polarities of "white/black, masculine/feminine, hetero/homosexual, where one term is always dominant and the other subordinate" (p.11); however, this understanding of identity as living within a binary is simplistic because it fails to take into account the multiple interwoven influences on an individual's life. Nilan and Feixa (2006) refer to the space in which identities are formed as a plural world of multiple influences:

> On the one hand, hybridization is a process of cultural interactions between the local and the global, the hegemonic and the subaltern, the centre and the periphery. On the other hand, hybridization is a process of cultural transactions that reflects how global cultures are assimilated in the locality, and how non-western cultures impact upon the West. (p. 2)

While it is understood, as Rutherford (1990) justly argues, that the dominant culture greatly impacts the subordinate, Nilan and Feixa (2006) outline how an individual in a state of hybridity finds the subordinate or "other" identity as having as much of an impact on the dominant influence. There is no singular influence on the formation of one's identity but rather there exists a complex liminal space in which identities overlap and influence each other.

Nilan and Feixa (2006) highlight that for youth, their worlds are not merely definitively plural; instead, the influences are *multiple* within a world which is *one* complex space. Willis (1990) concurs, stating that "what may seem even contradictory identity discourses to an older generation often do not seem so

to youth, who pull upon a pastiche of sources in their local creative practices" (as cited in Nilan & Feixa, 2006, p.2). Therefore, looking at hybridity as a space in-between a binary is too simplistic an understanding of hybrid identity as many intersections collide to define a person depending on their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, culture, place of origin, *ad infinitum*.

Ethnic/cultural identity

Defining identity based on binaries is becoming increasingly impossible as globalization shakes the foundation of daily life. The movement of peoples across borders disturbs the common binary associations of black/white and East/West. Ethnic and cultural identities are being redefined to incorporate global influences at the local level and local influences at the global level. Culture can simply be understood as a way of life "involving the use of power and influence (attempts to assert a 'dominant culture'), as well as the creation of resistant minority cultures and more fragmented subcultures (Hollands, 2004, para. 2.1). While race is a cultural construct that acts as biological science, "ethnicity is a distinctively cultural concept centred on the sharing of norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols and practices" (Barker, 1999, p. 62). Categorization based on ethnicities is dependent "on shared cultural signifiers which have developed under specific historical, social and political contexts and which encourage a sense of belonging often based, at least in part, on a common mythological ancestry" (p. 62).

The proliferation of Indian culture in the form of saris, bindis, henna, curry, traditional dance, etc. has had a global impact on dominant cultures. Moreover, the desire to Westernize is evident in local Indian cultures in the

clothing, mannerisms, and "English-ization", the incorporation of English words into local languages. While the global and local have an impact on dominant and subordinate cultures, the influence is not equally distributed. Much of the subordinate culture, in this case, Eastern traditions, is incorporated into dominant Western culture but not as something to be strived for but for the purposes of commodification. Rutherford (1990) argues that, "in the commodification of language and culture, objects and images are torn free of their original referents and their meanings become a spectacle open to almost infinite translation" (p. 11). The proliferation of Indian cultural artifacts as mentioned above does not have the same impact in which the West desires to be more Indian or Eastern beyond the desire for spectacle and "otherness." Sen (2005) suggests that, "The individuality of cultures is a big subject nowadays, and the tendency towards homogenization of cultures, particularly in some uniform Western mode, or in the deceptive form of 'modernity', has been strongly challenged" (p.123). Despite the forces of globalization, there is a movement amongst the local communities that rejects the Western method of modernization and places an importance on the unique Indian culture and local traditions (Sen, 2005, p.123)

For South Asian youth living in the diaspora, "multiple narratives of the self" (Barker, 1999, p.30) are a result of the intermingling of Eastern and Western cultural identities. While the diasporic subject grapples with these multiple narratives of the self that stem from the myriad cultural influences, there is a push by some to reclaim a particular "pure" Indian culture (Sen, 2005). The forces that attempt to separate the multiple narratives rather than benefit from them has

something to do with the post-colonial subject, affected by unequal power relations, attempting to reclaim a cultural ethnic identity that has already evolved from its previous form.

Youth diasporic identity

South Asian youth living in the Canadian diaspora experience weaving identities not merely between east and west but also amongst the various ethnic and cultural minorities who call Canada home. Living in the diaspora, a cultural/religious/ethnic home-away-from-home is not unique to South Asians. Young people, therefore, construct their identities through their experiences with multicultural public environments.

When discussing culture and identity, it is necessary to focus the discussion around the concept of power relations. Hollands (2004) outlines that the production of youth identity is to some extent in the hands of the individual; however, it occurs within the realm of power relations. His argument that power is at the centre of discussions surrounding hybrid identities is an important observation. In the case of South Asian youth, Western culture's latent power, defined by the term 'modern', can have a strong influence on youth when they are negotiating between tradition and modernity. The simple association of modernity with Western culture is problematic, as it assumes that religious, cultural and ethnic identities of the East are steeped in ancient traditions of the past and that the West has somehow evolved and matured. This affords legitimacy to the modern culture.

Hollands further argues that the "simple point that not all cultural mixing takes place on a level playing field, and issues of patriarchy, capitalism and western hegemonic cultural practice need to be seriously considered in any analysis of hybrid identities" (Hollands, 2004, para. 2.6). Hollands's concept of "the level playing field" outlines that cultural mixing does not occur evenly in the life of South Asian adolescents growing up in the diaspora. Western culture has a strong influence on many youth at some point in their formative years. Leonard (1997) argues that most youth in the West and the United States of America in particular, identify with American culture in the early years of identity development but often times will associate with the South Asian culture in their latter years. Early identification with Western cultural forms may occur because the diaspora offers South Asian culture from a diasporic context, removed from its origins and constantly evolving. Moreover, "the young people, even if they are consumers of South Asian culture in the diaspora, are themselves situated outside of South Asia" (Leonard, 1997, p. 151). Proximity to the source of a particular culture thus factors in when considering its influences on the development of identity.

Youth living in the diaspora face a major conflict of values between Western individualism and Eastern traditionalism. South Asian youth living in the diaspora often experience an impasse with parental expectations on love and romantic relationships. The formation of identity at adolescence is intertwined with the emergence of sexual identities. Many immigrant parents experience concern over the early identification with Western culture, as the formative years

of development have a large impact on identity formation. A general concern for

many South Asian immigrants is the Westernization of their children (Dayal,

1998) and they make attempts to rear youth in accordance with their cultural,

religious, and ethnic upbringings. Leonard (1997) highlights the distribution of

love and the emphasis on the individual over the family as key areas of concern

for South Asian immigrant parents. She states:

> They are troubled by the American emphasis on individualism, on
>
> marriage based on romantic love, on love between the married couple and
>
> for immediate family members rather than on love between parents and
>
> children and for extended family members. The more broadly distributed
>
> love that has sustained South Asian families across generations and many
>
> sets of cousins and 'uncles and aunties' seems diminished by the narrower
>
> emphases described above. Certainly the American focus on
>
> individualism, the freedom to make mistakes and correct them, explains
>
> many of the differing values and behaviors…between American society
>
> and that desired by recent South Asian immigrants. But instead of
>
> constructing stereotypes about 'Western' and 'Eastern' societies that
>
> hinder understanding and mutual appreciation, one needs to see those
>
> differences in historical perspective and recognize that the second
>
> generation of South Asian immigrants is bridging them. (p. 151)

Thus, Leonard argues that while there appears to be a set binary, youth are

bridging the gaps. The hybrid spaces are being filled with something new –

simultaneously Eastern and Western. Dayal (1998) concurs, further stating:

The South Asian American diaspora's liminal positioning highlights, but also adds a wrinkle to, what Frederick Buell calls the 'startling paradox of the era of the melting pot – simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, assimilation and segmentation, nationalizing Americanization and colonial exploitation' (148). The paradox is complicated by the fact that diasporic groups have a different perspective from those who considered themselves unproblematically Asian-American: the South Asian diaspora at any rate is not included and excluded, or assimilated and segmented, in equal measures compared with other minority groups. (p.238)

Education

South Asian youth living in the Canadian diaspora often face pressure from their parents to excel professionally and economically. For parents living in the diaspora, the "ambitions for the economic success of their offspring are extremely high. Young people are encouraged to undertake higher education and professional training, particularly in medicine and engineering" (Leonard, 1997, p.152). It is not difficult to find a South Asian-Canadian that has not been encouraged by his or her parents to pursue a professional degree in university. My own parents tried to mold me into following in my father's footsteps by completing a law degree. For my parents, the hope was for me to achieve success in ways that my father could not due to lack of opportunity and institutional racism that existed when he first moved to Canada. Also, achieving or maintaining upward mobility is important because it harkens back to life in the Indian subcontinent, where many villages, cities, and towns are structured on

strict adherence to class distinctions. The upper-class benefits from their elite

position in their privilege of living comfortably while having the power to control

and dominate the middle and lower classes. This distinction between classes,

while prevalent in many other societies, is especially significant to South Asian

communities because the disparity between the rich and the poor is paramount.

Moreover, the desire for young people to be successful in the diaspora is

important for many South Asian families, my own included, because financial

success in the diaspora means the fulfillment of the American dream – a reason

that many South Asians left their homes to migrate to the West.

Romantic lives

According to Leonard (1997), South Asian fathers are apprehensive over

their daughters' sexual activity because pregnancy before marriage brings shame

onto the family. The refusal of parents to acknowledge the sexual activity of their

adolescent children is an "extreme denial" (Leonard, 1997, p. 156). Leonard

argues that the, "management of desire, of sexuality and marriage, is an area of

crucial negotiation for second-generation South Asians" (p. 160). Therefore, the

youth often do not want to explicitly disobey their parents; instead, many youth

filter their daily activities and emotions without revealing their divided selves.

For young diasporic South Asians, sexual identity development is a

constant negotiation between family expectations and individual desires. The

attempts to conceal true feelings, romantic relationships, and desires become a

delicate balancing act in which a silent agreement between parent and child is

met: "don't ask", "don't tell", and in some cases, "don't act". In such incidences

where severe limitations are placed on youth by parental figures, restrictions are met with rebellious attempts to exercise individual power with varying success rates and consequences.

Media influence

The media's influence on identity formation is a topic that is discussed and debated by many theorists. Stuart Hall (1996) asserts that identities are constructed as a result of representations:

> Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. (p.4)

The representations of South Asians in various visual media are important to identity formation for individuals, especially youth growing up in the diaspora, because of its pedagogic value. Youth not only learn *how to be* South Asian but also *what it means to be* South Asian based on the popular representations portrayed by Western and Eastern media. The media is the link that connects individuals in the diaspora to cultural products at home and abroad. According to Stuart Hall, "identities are formed within and through representations is important to debates about culture, identity and television because TV is the major communicative device for disseminating those representations which are

constitutive of (and constituted by) cultural identity" (as cited in Barker, 1999, p. 31).

Not only are the representations of South Asians in the media important to South Asian youth in the formation of their own identities, but the images are also important to defining South Asian identity in general for mainstream Western audiences. With the recent success of the Hollywood movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, a new wave of interest from Western audiences in Bollywood and South Asian identity has erupted. The precursor to the *Slumdog* era of Western interest in images of South Asians stemmed from the successes of films like *Bend it Like Beckham* and, to a lesser extent, Deepa Mehta's *Bollywood Hollywood*. The earlier films tap the interests of Western audiences because of familiar themes of marriage, love, and family tensions that hark back to older English narratives, even before Shakespeare. *Slumdog Millionaire* is unique as it is an adaptation of a novel by an Indian author, retold by an English director, from the perspective of a young Indian man. The representations of India throughout the film have been hotly debated. For some people in the Indian community, the representation of one of the fastest developing countries as dirty, poor, and infested with crime is offensive and outrageous. For others, the representations reflect the hidden reality for many marginalized slum dwellers in India. Regardless of the position one takes on the issue, the effect that the movie has had on Western audiences must be examined. The film creates a safe Indian identity for Western audiences to grasp; an identity that is connected on some levels to poverty and strife but, through sheer determination and tenacity, a rise to fortune and attainment of love. This

story is a familiar one. It is acceptable. The story reflects the tale of many immigrants that faced struggles in the diasporas around the world. It is the story of my parents and the many South Asians that Western audiences have come into contact with. Moreover, it is delivered with a song and dance routine at the end. Jai Ho.

Bollywood

Bollywood is the Hindi language film industry located in Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay. Bollywood's movie production is conservatively estimated at around 800 films per year and is second to Hollywood in monetary terms (Virdi, 2003; Dudrah, 2006). Approximately fifteen million people screen the movies each day and Bollywood is easily understood as a major cultural influence in India and abroad and as affordable entertainment for the masses. Bollywood is identified as the cinema of the masses because of its high entertainment value, frequent use of melodrama, music, and morality (Virdi, 2003). The industry is known internationally as the film industry of all of India; however, many regional examples in the southern part of India also exist and enjoy comparative success. Estimates of the number of languages in India are conservatively over 100 with Hindi spoken by 40% of population (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). While South India has more film production (Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telegu), films from Mumbai are given more importance because of the use of Hindi and its claim to cater to *all* Indians (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). For Dudrah (2006), Bollywood extends beyond the borders of Hindi speakers and Indians because of "the fact that it has been subtitled and

dubbed into several Asiatic and European languages (more than any of India's other cinemas) makes it by far the most popular" (p.30).

The genres range from: mythological, devotional, romantic, action, historical, social, and family drama. (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). The themes that are commonly present in Bollywood movies are: tradition/familial expectations versus individual desire with respect to love and marriage; the conflict of the transnational subject between retaining identity, representations of East and West, tradition versus modernity, and village life versus city life (Uberoi, 1998; Dudrah, 2006). Uberoi (1998) lists the common features of popular Bollywood movies, which paints a picture of the idealized Indian values:

1) The "idealisation and naturalisation of the institution of the *patrilineal joint family*." (the fathers returning to India to find daughter-in-laws for their sons. (p.29)

2) Patriarchal family structure. Father's responsibility for the marriage of their children and authority to reject or accept future partners. "For the father of a daughter, this authority is scripted as the right and duty to *gift* his daughter in marriage, and on the purity of this gift and the solemnity of his pledge is staked his personal honour as a patriarch. (p.30)

3) Marriage as an alliance of families not just individuals. (p. 30)

Local vs. global; East vs. West

The increasing interplay between local and global as well as East and West has led to the influence of Western cinematic methods on Bollywood. MTV-style has influenced film directors to new innovated styles in "the pace of

the films, fast cutting, superimpositions, [and] newer ways of presenting dance

sequences" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004, p. 3). The irony that exists in the

use of Western styles of editing and cinematography is in the content of some

films, where the characters strive to maintain their "Indianness" in the face of

Western diasporic threats. The threat that the West poses on India is an

increasingly common theme in national identity formation. The theme of

emigration reveals a vilification of the Indian émigré as corrupted by Western

influence (Dudrah, 2006; Virdi, 2003; Uberoi, 1998). Uberoi (1998) expands on

this concept, arguing that:

> The émigré or foreign returned Indian, or the excessively westernized one,
>
> has been defined as the moral antithesis of the one who stays behind, the
>
> one whose values remain steadfast. The projection of the anxieties of
>
> modernization and identity loss, typically focused on women's sexuality,
>
> has been a fairly consistent theme in Indian commercial cinema and other
>
> media of popular culture over the last half century or so. (p.5)

Success is an important theme in Bollywood cinema, which is evident in the focus

on characters that are rich both in India and abroad in either the United Kingdom

or North America. Despite his or her success, the émigré is often portrayed

negatively if completely assimilated to Western society and culture. Typically, the

fears of identity loss for both the émigré and the young generation of children

being raised outside of India are projected in Bollywood movies that take place in

the diaspora. The cinematic space has become a site to express anxieties faced by

the South Asian populace in an increasingly global world. Virdi (2003) highlights

that while the cinema is presented as a potential space to negotiate these problems, issues, and tensions; the movies often suggest improbable solutions and unrealistic utopian endings.

Nation and national identity

Bollywood is important to the national identity of Indians as it represents not only India but also the people as a collective entity on an international scale. As such, Bollywood is involved in the formation of the nation and its national identity. In India, the division or unification of the country is largely influenced by the theme of the latest Bollywood movie. Pro-nationalist movies that plot India versus Pakistan or even Hindus versus Muslims (a sub-theme in *Slumdog Millionaire*), have had real effects on the day-to-day lives of millions of Indian citizens as the films rehash religious, ethnic, and national tensions. Other films address these real issues and provide utopian solutions – which are often embraced by the heterogeneous communities in India. Virdi (2003) argues that the cinematic influence in India is so profound due to low literacy rates that they result in a dependency on non-print media beyond that of radio and television. Modern day issues and anxieties are presented and resolved through use of metaphors and discourses alongside stock characters, tropes, and symbols (Virdi, 2003).

Bollywood is most important in the focus on the Indian family. The social institution that defines the essence of being Indian, and to many degrees South Asian, is the family (Uberoi, 1998). In the films, the various characters and gender roles emerge to form the Indian national identity. The Indian male is depicted as

the protector of his female family members as well as keeper of their sexual purity (Virdi, 2003). The portrayal of proper gender roles within the family and community at large has an impact on the diasporic communities that consume these films. Many films portray "proper" Indian traditions not only to encourage adherence to these traditions in the Indian subcontinent but also in the diaspora. The film producers often juxtapose these "proper" values due to a deep seeded anxiety of the loss of values in the diaspora: "In Hindi cinema the figure of the diasporic Indian is metonymic of this anxiety of the invasion of the west and disappearance of an 'Indian identity,' which it cleverly manipulates to reimagine the nation in response to changing conditions" (Virdi, 2003, p. 197). However, while it was popular to depict a corrupted diasporic Indian subject in early films, Dudrah (2006) demonstrates the progression of the NRI in Hindi cinema. The 1990s had a shift in the representation of the diaspora in Bollywood. The NRI would have an English or American accent but would know and adhere to their roots.

The values of individualism, freedom and choice are seen as subversive in Bollywood because they are connected to Western values. These values are thought to lead to a threat of loss of heritage and loss of "Indianness". The representation of the traditional ideal Indian occurs almost in opposition to the Western media's representations of South Asians. Dudrah (2006) reflects on this perspective when he says that such representations "that depict a myriad sense of South Asianness are actively sought, particularly given the limited range of images depicting South Asians in the mainstream mass media in the West"

(Dudrah, 2006, p.35). Dudrah highlights an issue that must be further considered - the lack of meaningful representations not only in Western media but also in South Asian cinema.

Bollywood and the diaspora: Why is it important abroad?

Bollywood is an important cultural artifact to examine in relation to the South Asian-Canadian diaspora because of Western associations of movie content to South Asian culture and ways of life. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004) believe that "by studying a culture, we acquire deeper understandings of the customs, behaviour patterns, values, arts and crafts and the practices of everyday life of the people inhabiting that culture" (p.10). For many South Asians living in the various diasporas around the world, Bollywood is the only link to a distant culture and a nostalgic view of the past. Hindi cinema "resonates powerfully with the Indian diaspora, often becoming their only connection with the homeland and the main intergenerational culture diasporic families share while located in places as far-flung as Australia, Africa, Britain, Canada, the Caribbean islands, Southeast Asia, and the United States" (Virdi, 2003, p. 2). Moreover, for youth growing up in the diaspora, Bollywood is a site of alternate representations of their culture that stands apart from the dominant depictions commonly seen in the white mainstream (Dudrah, 2006). Bollywood affords legitimacy because of the perception of its authentic depictions of South Asians, especially Indians, and their ways of life. Many diasporic subjects have embraced Bollywood films as a pedagogical tool to maintain and teach this culture and way of life to the new generation of youth growing up abroad (Brosius, 2005).

"What did she say?"

"..."

"What did she say?!"

"..."

"What's happening? What does that mean?"

"Shhh! Go play upstairs!"

My earliest memories of Bollywood are from my childhood, sitting in the basement in front of the old Panasonic television set while my mother slid the video tape into the VCR. It took a few seconds before the static cleared and the movie would begin. The faces of the beautiful women and rugged men would interact before me but I could not participate. Sometimes, I would sit quietly after being hushed by my mother and watch the song and dance sequences. Eventually I would leave, frustrated by the lack of access to the plot and story line. As I described earlier, my work is a story about what *is not*. I identified with these images as authentically Indian but as a result, felt like my lived experience was not authentic. My dark skin, frizzy hair, and ways of practicing culture were all very different from the images that danced on the screen before my eyes. My experience with Bollywood did not include me in a collective culture – it alienated me. My parents were still authentically Indian in my eyes because they could understand the sounds of the language – the very same ones that bounced off my ears and refused to make sense. They could speak the words that would not form on my lips. For me, Bollywood was not a pedagogical tool that brought

me closer to my parents and their country of birth. It distanced me from them because I could not share the experience or make sense of what they enjoyed. As diasporic subjects, my parents continued to consume these films and they would eventually begin to tell their own stories as Indian immigrants to a foreign land.

Bollywood and the diaspora enjoy a symbiotic relationship culturally and economically. The South Asian diasporas have become an important market for Bollywood film producers as avid consumers of the cultural, linguistic, and material products. Mishra (2002) posits that the West is endorsed as a space of wealth and prosperity, a space to be desired and strived for. She states that, "because of the influence in capital of the second wave of migrants, they have become an important market of popular culture through cinema in Bollywood" (p.236). The imagined glamorous lifestyles and the diasporic communities' willingness to consume have led to an explosion of Bollywood films featuring Indians on their journeys abroad; thus, tapping into a willing market of consumers that have experienced similar stories and cultural experiences.

Bollywood representations of the diasporic subject are contentious, as film producers characterize the NRI as upper-caste Hindu, economically successful, and culturally competent in the Western world; thereby, setting this image as the pan-Indian identity. Desai (2007) furthers this point arguing that, "Indian life, as it came to be portrayed in the NRI genre, whether it was located in India or abroad, was the life of the upper-caste and upper-class Indians" (p.58). The image painted by film producers ignores the heterogeneous nature of Indian and South Asian societies as a whole.

While the films created the Indian diasporic subjectivity, so too did they define the spaces that the diasporic subject occupied. The West, in Bollywood cinema, became a space associated with vice because of the potential for 'good' Indian men and women to live out their desires – whether sexual, financial, or social. The West, as a site of desire and immorality, is a theme visited in the NRI genre because, as Uberoi (1998) suggests, "the sexual behaviour and marriage choices of first and second generation Indian emigrants are a matter of major concern for the NRI community, both in real life and in diasporic fiction, drama and cinema" (p.5). By implicating the West as evil, the movies manufacture the binary of the East as pure and good. The homeland is often represented as the space of religion, the family, and good values in opposition to the godlessness, individuality, and immorality that occurs in the West. Characters in the West are either represented as conforming to the ills of Western society or fighting against assimilation to maintain their Indianness and return to the homeland. The narrow representation of the NRI diasporic experience is increasingly examined by film makers in Bollywood cinema but is criticized as a nationalist project merged with film makers' own longing for an ideal India (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004; Dudrah, 2006). Placing the NRI in two extremes is problematic because it ignores the complexity of the diasporic experience, the tensions and resolutions made, and the negotiations individuals face on a daily basis. Youth in particular struggle with living in this liminal space that often is ignored by Bollywood cinema. Therefore, the question still remains: how does Eastern and Western media's limited representation of South Asian identity impact youth living in the diaspora?

Chapter 4 – Experiencing Identity Formation

> *"So, where are you from?"*

> *"Canada."*

> *"No. Where are you from?"*

> *"Oh. I was born in Toronto."*

> *"No, no, no. Where are you REALLY from?"*

> *"... My parents are from India."*

> *"You're Indian? You don't look Indian!"*

> *"I'm Canadian. What am I supposed to look like?"*

Identity

Identity development for South Asian youth born and raised in the Canadian diaspora varies depending on the context and personal experiences of the individual. Hall (1992) discusses the notion of the individual assuming multiple identities at different times. This concept of multiple 'narratives of the self' suits the South Asian experience as youth often find themselves in conflict with the identity marked by the their skin colour and that of their birthplace or homeland. The question "where are you from?" is a loaded question to ask any individual living in Canada. The assumption that one is from somewhere else is indicative of Canada as a country of immigrants, unless indigenous to the land; however, it has a deeper meaning embedded in the relations of power. To ask an individual where they are *really* from, suggests that an insider/outsider dichotomy is established based on certain criteria of what a "true" Canadian looks like.

Insider status is given to white skinned individuals of European descent and outsider status is all 'Other'. The assumption that one is or is not from Canada based on the colour of one's skin is a dangerous site to tread, for it establishes a norm in which 'Canadian' is white European and all 'Other' are from somewhere else. The assumption is dangerous for the obvious reason that it establishes a sense of authority and possession over 'Canadianness' that the 'Other' cannot grasp. The 'Other' must constantly qualify where they are from. This practice essentially denies their authenticity as a citizen of this nation because they cannot be a 'true' Canadian. Being a 'true' Canadian or 'true' South Asian is a site of conflict for youth possessing hybrid identities. One is neither and both – both Canadian and South Asian and neither one nor the other.

Where are you really from?

Skin colour at school and home took on drastically different significance for me. At school, issues of identity were black and white – literally. I was denied my ethnicity and heritage because my skin was not white, which automatically meant that I must be black. I remember speaking to a white girl in my daycare when I was eight years old and asking her what she thought my ethnicity was. She replied that I am black. My Pakistani friend, who was only one or two shades darker than the white girl asked the same question and received the same answer – she too was black.

When I wasn't being confused for being black, I was grouped into another category – the Paki. I distinctly remember when "Paki" was a derogatory name for South Asians, regardless of their place of origin. The term was insulting not

just because those who used it were calling me Pakistani and ignoring the myriad places of origin that South Asians call home, mistakenly grouping all brown skin into one; but also, it was *the way* the term was used, as if the word was spit out in disgust. The shame of being different is difficult to cope with in elementary school, even more so when you are not allowed to be Canadian because of your skin colour and despite your place of birth. Being Indian was not cool in my community and I took any chance that I got to show how Canadian I was. Despite all of this, I rarely felt threatened in school because of my skin colour. Looking back at my class pictures, there were other non-white faces in the crowd. I was not the only brown one. That distinction was reserved for the 1970s when my cousin attended the same elementary school and was nicknamed 'Chocolate' by her peers. I was denied my heritage but not overtly teased or emotionally affected by my skin colour; that feeling arose in the home.

These derogatory terms and ways of teasing are partly the reason for the divide in the South Asian community amongst immigrants and the first-generation born in Canada. The first-generation or long-time residents and new immigrants often find it difficult to get along. Much of this conflict has to do with levels of assimilation. The first-generation and long-time residents of Canada often want to identify as being Canadian and having the right to be accepted by the mainstream white public. The belief is that being born here should absolve a person from being teased because his or her mannerisms, accent, and public conduct are Westernized. The first-generation often distance themselves from new immigrants because they are considered to be "FOBs", fresh off the boat.

New immigrants are not yet acquainted with the accepted ways to behave or speak and are embarrassing for some, because being authentically Indian is not considered 'cool' in Canada. Being exotic, on the other hand, is favoured; however, exotic and authentic are two different things. Exotic values the desirable features of difference, like particular facial features, diluted accents, and certain aromas. The exotic is rarely fully authentic; it is the whiff of aromatic incense and not the overpowering smell of curry. The lack of a discourse of hybridity for many white people resulted in the grouping of all 'Other' into one category where they were labeled as the antithesis to white.

> *Blackie*
>
> *"This is my daughter, Anita."*
>
> *"This is your daughter?"*
>
> *"Han ji."*
>
> *"She's…blackie blackie, no?"*

To be dark in the Indian community is typically an undesirable physical feature. People don't have to outright tell you that lighter is better but we learn it from various sources, some of the most obvious being that good and evil are signified by light and dark respectively in Western literature. The association of dark skin as undesirable was never overtly stated but learned through small actions that I quickly picked up. I remember moments in my childhood when I would watch my mom get ready to go out. Her makeup routine always included patting her face down with powder that lightened her complexion. I gathered that this was a necessary step to being beautiful. My aunts would join her, some with

excess powder to accentuate their already light skin. The plethora of skin bleaching creams on the market for women and men, the most popular being "Fair and Lovely," underscore this craze. The desire to be light-skinned stems from colonial times where the *sahib* and *memsahib* were hierarchically superior in everyway. The desire for light skin arises even before the period of British occupation to the caste system, where the darkest skinned peoples made up most of the lower castes and the untouchables.

While watching Bollywood movies, the light faces of the women reflected back to me and were beautiful. The women were always fair but the men could be dark. These instances are burned into my memory. I learned that fairness in skin tone is favoured from an early age in the subtle ways that my family reinforced this idea. I was the dark one – nicknamed Blackie by my aunt's friend that met me one summer. The name stuck for a little while amongst my cousins, who are varying shades of skin colour lighter than me. I learned that summer tans were less desirable from general comments like, "You have become too dark" and "Don't worry, your tan will fade in the winter."

I grew up thinking that I was different in the Indian community because of my dark skin. I knew I was different in school because I was not white, but to be different amongst your own ethnic group itself is another blow to one's self-esteem. My father - like me - is dark-skinned but my mother - like my sister - is several shades lighter. The contrast in skin colours between myself and my sister was my constant reminder that I am different and, to an extent, not beautiful to the Indian community. My dark skin also reminded me that I did not look typically

Indian to Canadian society. Everywhere around me, I would see lighter-skinned Indians that highlighted my difference. All of my cousins living in Canada are from my mom's side of the family, and they are relatively fair- skinned compared to my dad's side, which all live in India and prior to 1992, had never met me.

The very first time that I realized my Indianness was on my second trip to India. It took me 22 years to realize that I have a prototypical South Indian look and that the distortion that I grew up with is in large part due to Bollywood media and patterns of migration to Canada. My thirteen-year-old twin cousins came up to me and my sister, looked at us both after meeting us for the first time since they were born, and pronounced in the blunt Kerala style that I look Indian and my sister does not. I was stunned. The two parts of their short sentence shattered everything that I thought I knew, everything those 22 years had taught me. *I* look Indian? My sister *does not*? All my life, my sister was the Indian-looking one and I was not. In Canada, she looked like the people on television, in the movies, and in the South Asian diaspora in Toronto. In Canada, I have been asked more than once if I am Jamaican or African.   I felt a wave of realization beginning to hit me hard. I looked at my surroundings, beginning with the twins. They had the same dark skin as me and my dad. My older cousins too, were dark like me. The mess of frizzy curls on their heads were brushed out and braided, but they still matched my carefully styled gelled curls. I walked the city with new eyes, absorbing the skin, the hair, and the faces around me. I *am* Indian, I just didn't know it. I knew it as an ethnic distinction but I did not feel that I represented India. It was at that

moment that I knew that I represented an unknown, less contrived face of India -
and there were a lot of us.

It was then that I began to think about what the media had been teaching
me about my heritage and culture as an Indian. Living in Canada, my frame of
reference for Indianness began with my family, extended to the South Asian
community, and was reinforced by Western and Indian media. Everything that I
saw in these areas was something that I am not – born in India, linguistically
versed in an Indian language, and light-skinned were the major factors against my
owning Indian as an identity in Canada.

Ew! What's that smell?

The girls sat in the basement watching Saturday morning cartoons.
Uniforms on, belts tied, hair tucked back neatly, fingernails clipped. They
glanced at the clock awaiting the end of the show, knowing one of them had to
remind their mom that it was time to go. They couldn't be late.

"You go tell her."

"No! You go."

"I went last time! It's your turn."

"...fine."

The younger of the two trudged up the stairs. The wafting smell of fried onions,
garlic, ginger, tumeric, dhania, jeera, and garam masala assaulted her senses
with every step she took, growing in potency as she neared the door. Her stomach
responded positively to the smell of the spices, growling slightly in hunger, but

her face was grim. She turned the doorknob and popped her head around the corner toward the kitchen.

"Mom?"

No response.

"Mom!"

No response.

She sighed and pushed the door further, running quickly around the corner to the stove where her mom was stirring a bubbling pot of steaming chicken curry. The window was open but the smell of the spices remained concentrated in the kitchen and throughout the rest of the house.

"Mom, it's time to go! We're gonna get pushups if we're late!"

"Ok, go wait outside."

She ran back to the basement, got her sister and they ran up the stairs and straight out the door. When they got to the porch they doused themselves in cheap perfume, hoping the Eau de toilette will smell better than Eau de chicken curry. It doesn't.

They got to the karate dojo and hung up their jackets in the change room. They hoped not to hear the words that they heard every Saturday morning at karate class but they were disappointed. The words cut into their hearts and seep through their veins like grease through a samosa.

"Ew! What's that smell?"

When cooking dinner at home, our family, like many South Asian families, would open the windows in the kitchen and even go to the extent of installing a heavy duty exhaust vent over the stove in order to direct the food vapors outside. Most importantly, bedroom doors get closed to prevent clothing from 'smelling Indian'. As a kid, I remember our family doing this; yet every Saturday morning I would be teased by my cousins for 'smelling Indian'. The ritual before karate classes was to change in our bedrooms and run down the stairs and out the door. On the porch, my sister and I would spray perfume all over us and then get into the car. The frantic over-spraying of cheap perfume on our curry-scented clothing had as much success as Axe body spray has of attracting legions of women to sweaty teenage boys. We got teased as soon as we entered the change room. We still smelled but instead of smelling like curry, we now smelled like curry scented Polo Sport.

"Ew, what's that smell?" My heart still races when I heard that question being asked recently after leaving my house on a Saturday morning to do some errands at the grocery store. There is food all around me but I know that the array of vegetables, fruits, breads, meats, and cheeses are not the source of the offensive smell. I know that my dad started cooking early the morning that question was asked - frying the onions, garlic, and ginger to begin our Saturday afternoon lunch. As is typical of my father, he did not turn on the exhaust vent that we had installed over our stovetop. I had sat down in the kitchen to eat some toast and drink some tea before leaving so I definitely 'smell Indian'. I quickly turned

down the closest aisle – the pet food section – we do not have a pet but I had managed to escape a pair of accusatory eyes.

"Smelling Indian" in the grocery store is not equivalent to walking out of the gym after having run on the treadmill for one hour and pumping some iron. The scent of sweat that soaks a person's body and clothing after a hard workout is earned and even excusable because it is an accepted aftermath of exercising. "Smelling Indian" is offensive, an overbearing rush of "foreign" spices attacking the scent glands of unsuspecting white Canadians. I grew up with this feeling and to this day, have to fight with my own emotions of embarrassment for the aroma of Indian cuisine. A lot of non-*desis* (non-Indians) would not understand this feeling because South Asian cuisine has become very popular in recent years and many people, especially in the Greater Toronto Area, have become accustomed to eating at South Asian restaurants and cooking South Asian foods at home. However, the popularity of South Asian cuisine is fairly recent and despite its popularity, I still face the "Ew, what's that smell?" question in various forms.

The Saturday morning rituals were mildly embarrassing but we had to eat, despite smelling Indian and being teased a little; thus, it was a sacrifice we had to make. As I got older and South Asian cuisine became increasingly mainstream, the smelling Indian phenomenon died down for the most part. Samosas became a hit in the mainstream culture and became a feature at most potlucks. I remember working in an office one summer where we had a potluck. The supervisors were organizing the event and told us to bring something "ethnic." I thought about what that meant and decided that I did not feel like being the token Indian at the

potluck and decided that I would make something else. I wrote down my food item on the list that was going around and thought nothing of it until my boss came up to me and said, "Anita, can you bring Indian food?" I was a little surprised and secretly happy that Indian cuisine could sit beside the lasagnas, noodles, and other dishes that were listed on the sheet of paper. I replied that I could bring butter chicken curry, a fairly popular Indian dish in white mainstream culture. My boss's response is something that I have thought about and referred to repeatedly over the years. She said, "Don't bring curry because the smell might offend some people."

Why would the smell offend people? Doesn't lasagna have a smell? What about the spanikopita? What is it about "smelling Indian" that offends some people? It is a question that I have returned to time and again with my experiences as a child going to karate classes up until my adulthood working in an office. Why was I trained to feel embarrassed about the aroma of my cultural foods? Why are some aromas accepted, and even labeled an aroma versus being labeled a smell or an odor? My boss and her Eurocentric mentality remind me that being Indian in a white mainstream culture is something that I was taught to be embarrassed about despite the rising popularity of South Asian culture and cuisine. The white mainstream wants the exotic food that is now popularly accepted with the commercialization of South Asian culture, but they do not want the unpleasant "offensive" smells, sights, and sounds that accompany it. Moreover, only some aspects of Indian culture are fully accepted. The harsh

accents, strong smells, and non-Western mannerisms have not made it into the realm of "cool" or general acceptance.

Underlying what is accepted and unaccepted, included and excluded, are mechanisms of power relations. The dominant culture allows for certain aspects of the exotic into the mainstream – celebrating it from a narrative of multiculturalism, yet maintaining distance by filtering what breaks through. In the popular American television show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, the incorporation of "world dance" into the program is celebrated by the judges as an accomplishment of diversity and multiculturalism in which the program is disseminating the wonders of dance from across the world. There is no mention of ballroom, contemporary, or lyrical dance as having a country of origin. Instead, Bollywood is a spectacle of colours, flash, bells, and foreign "otherness" to be consumed. This injection of "world dance" into the program has two functions. First, it categorizes certain art forms – African, Indian, and Russian – as 'other' which effectively defines the Western European and American art forms as the norm. The dialogue surrounding the dances from the West is not, for the most part, centred on its cultural origins. It is critiqued based on the delivery and attention to technical elements. However, the "ethnic" performances are described as 'fun,' 'energetic,' 'lively,' and as bringing 'culture' to the stage whereas the other dance forms, such as the mainstream, do not.

The second function that the injection of world dance has is to demonstrate the myth of America and the West as increasingly accepting and multicultural. By bringing "world dance" to the American stage, the show,

producers, and television network present tolerance of 'other' cultures by displaying their dance forms. Sen (2005) rejects this myth of freedom and tolerance as central to Western culture because of the Western tradition of exclusion of women and slaves. He argues that there is a tendency in the West to portray Indian traditions as distant from Western mainstream traditions and therefore is something "new" to be introduced to and exploited.

Media - Hollywood

The influence that the media has on South Asian youth growing up in the diaspora is an important factor to consider. As Stuart Hall (1996) argues, representations, in this case, cultural or ethnic representations, affect how individuals might represent themselves. Representations consist of words and images that stand in for groups and categories. They provide ways of thinking about these groups. They may also influence how groups are perceived and, thus, affect their experiences in the social world. Empowered peoples have the privilege and authority to construct assumptions about different groups - making positive and negative representations. This is a form of social marginalization used to limit the power and public presence of certain groups. These practices are central to the politics of representation. In short, representation involves the process of "speaking for" and "speaking of" those who are represented.

Our culture is saturated by images transmitted through the media. One position argues that media representations are a reflection of society; the way society truly exists. Stuart Hall challenges this position, arguing that media representations construct how people or groups are viewed by the way meaning is

given to the things being represented. True meaning depends on what people make of it and so it depends on how it is represented. Meanings are produced, they do not exist by themselves; and it is human social practices and activities that produce meaning. The media plays a central role in the distribution of ideas, which raises the question of power. Who circulates meaning to whom?

The media's overarching presence in the lives of individuals, both adult and youth, suggest that the representations depicted in Western media have the potential to influence youth in their own self-representation. In effect, South Asian youth learn about what it means to be a South Asian in the diaspora from the representations of South Asians in Western media. It is difficult to name a handful of prominent South Asian characters on American television shows. Prior to *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, it was even more difficult to name South Asian characters on Canadian television shows.

The most distinct character that comes to mind and therefore, arguably, has the strongest impact on South Asian youth is Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons*. The knowledge production that is created about South Asian identity begins with his name. Apu's name is a source of humour. His first name, when phonetically pronounced, is funny for Western audiences in a toilet humour sense. His eighteen letter last name is a jab at the long, tongue-twisting last names that are popularly associated to South Asians, especially those from Tamil-speaking areas in India and Sri Lanka. Names tell a lot about an individual, and the combination of his first and last name mainly have the effect of accentuating his 'otherness' or foreign identity. He is not American in many ways and his

name highlights this fact. Not only does it characterize him as 'other' but it also establishes that being an 'other' can be funny. Apu's character teaches Western audiences that foreignness is funny because it is not Western. Not only does his name underscore this point, but so too does his accent.

Dave (2005) questions the value of accent and cultural citizenships. The author asks, "how does the endorsement of a South Asian accent on television sanction a limited vision of the South Asian presence in the United States and how does this vision reinforce a static American cultural ethnic citizenship?" (p. 316). The questions that she raises are important, as Apu's character, as the representative of all South Asians, fails to embody the complex myriad cultures of the South Asian subcontinent; yet, he represents the heterogeneous group nonetheless. For American and Western audiences, Apu reinforces a limited view of what it means to be South Asian. Moreover, his accent is important to dissect. Dave (2005) argues that it is classified as "a specific racializing trait among South Asians which simultaneously connotes foreignness and class and cultural privilege" (p. 314). The effect that Apu's accent has on Western audiences is to connect his voice to the South Asian population as a whole, which results in Western audiences expecting this accent to emerge from South Asian people in general.

> *"You're Indian?"*
>
> *"Yeah, but I am born here."*
>
> *"Say something with an Indian accent!"*

"Why?"

"Because it's funny!"

The accent automatically marks South Asians as an 'other' and Apu's character as a comedic relief connotes accent with humour in real life situations. For youth, the resulting effect is the expectation to reproduce this "funny" sounding voice for comedic purposes; however, what is it that is funny about South Asian accents that are not funny about North American accents? The embedded sources of power must be examined to answer this question. What makes it funny is that it is different but British accents are different too and they do not receive the same response as the South Asian accent. Why is it funny to be different or what is it about being different that is so funny? Westerners laugh at the accent because it is not the norm and is therefore, 'other.' To laugh at what is not the norm places the group in question in a marginalized space – effectively establishing their inferiority in the hierarchy of power. Although categorized as inferior, South Asians are accepted minorities because they are model minorities. Dave (2005) concurs, arguing that the performance of the South Asian accent, or, what she calls "brown voice," establishes a static, all-encompassing image for South Asians as successful, model minority, immigrant, foreigners. This image contains the heterogeneous group into one contained identity that can be used for consumption through media representations, such as Apu.

Knowledge is power because the people with power control the knowledge that we receive about groups. If one controls knowledge and the distribution of knowledge then one has the power to decide what information

society receives and what is 'fact' and 'truth.' Thus, communication is always linked with power. The media disseminates knowledge about groups to the public, often through stereotypical representations. These images are repeated and become the accepted norm. Anything that deviates from the norm can be ridiculed or maligned for the purposes of maintaining the established hierarchy. South Asians are largely represented through Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism. This theory explains how imperialist and colonialist mentalities are the basis for the depictions of the East by the West. Said explains how the West examines the 'other' through a distorted lens called Orientalism, which provides racist understandings of the foreign or different. In this manner, difference can be contained. It is exotic, can be consumed for pleasure, but is always inferior. The knowledge that the West receives about South Asians is largely Indian, Hindu, upper caste/class traditions. South Asians become generalized as North Indian, denying personal histories, languages, cultures, traditions, religions, etc. as these categories become homogenized. What are the implications of this knowledge production on South Asians? Who is left out of the equation? How does this affect their identity formation or interactions with the world? What about those individuals that do not fit into the Orientalist framework because of their hybridity? For me, I always fell in between.

Sounding Indian

My accent in school was my ticket to acceptance. I wasn't a FOB – fresh off the boat – I was Canadian despite the colour of my skin. I was accepted. I would watch the other South Asian kids that immigrated to Canada from India,

Pakistan, or Sri Lanka being teased for the inflections in their voice and their heavy accents. Being born and raised in Canada and speaking English as my mother tongue helped me avoid a similar fate, despite the fact that any source of difference in elementary school can be enough reason for the bullies to begin their work. However, in the Indian community, my accent was my detriment. I wasn't a FOB but I was an ABCD – an American Born Confused Desi. I was Canadian, despite the colour of my skin. I was not accepted, perhaps more harshly because I could not speak any Indian language. Even when I tried to speak my father's mother tongue, Malayalam, this horrible reminder of being born in Canada followed me with every mispronounced sound that even my dark skin could not mask. Even worse, the South Asian diasporic communities was mainly composed of Hindi speakers at the time, and did not offer language heritage classes in Malayalam. My neighbours and friends would go to school on Saturday mornings to learn Hindi, Urdu, or Punjabi and could converse with each other at school, which left me out and furthered my alienation. The issue of language is important to being an insider within any given community. India, however, is unique in that it has several recognized national languages but officially teaches Hindi and English in most schools across the country. Thus, Hindi has become the language of reference for Indians internationally. This did not help me, because I could not speak Malayalam or Hindi. Thus, I was deprived of circumstances which might have redeemed me in the eyes of the South Asian community in Toronto.

Growing up with media influences telling me that to be Indian or South Asian meant to have command of a 'foreign' language meant that I was not fully

Indian. I could mimic Apu's accent but I was not authentically Indian in my inability to speak a South Asian language; however, the representations had an alternate effect as well. The knowledge production that is created by Western media may not necessarily teach youth like myself that these representations are what it means to be South Asian; instead, it may have the opposite effect of teaching youth that the representations depicted in the media are *not* what it means to be South Asian. South Asian-ness in the diaspora is more complex than what is depicted particularly because it does not reflect the diasporic identity as within and between two or more cultures.

Bollywood and knowledge creation

I grew up watching Bollywood movies with my mother. Without command of the Hindi language, the images that danced before me had a pedagogic value. Amidst the songs, dances, painful death scenes, and dramatic fight sequences, I watched fair-skinned faces playing the parts of hero and heroine. They spoke Hindi, another foreign language to me, and this authenticated them as true Indians from my perspective; I did not realize then how they failed to represent all of India. This fair-skinned sample of the Indian population distorted my view of Indianness because I grew up thinking that I am not as Indian as the rest and am less desirable. The kids in school thought I was black and I did not look like my cousins or my sister. As well, other Indian people often do not recognize that I am Indian. They ask me if I am from the West Indies or Sri Lanka and are shocked when I say that I am Indian. The mass of curly black hair and dark brown skin is not an image popularly connected to the subcontinent.

For adults and youth living in the diaspora, Bollywood is an important tool of knowledge production and identity formation. Bollywood's power as cultural knowledge producer is evident in its ability to unify a global diasporic community with the North Indian, Hindi locale, giving people across the world "shared 'structures of feeling' that in turn produce a transnational sense of communal solidarity" (Mishra, 2002, p. 238). These shared structures of feeling have the power to define belonging to a nation or community by the construction of "an Indian diaspora of shared cultural idioms" (Mishra, 2002, p. 238). For adolescent diasporic subjects, Bollywood legitimizes the diasporic existence as it brings a distant culture to life in the local nation-state. The parental attempt to establish culture through visual media may be understood by South Asian youth as necessary for the continuation of cultural identity away from its place of origin (Mishra, 2002).

For both adult and youth Bollywood consumers, the films act as a conduit to the culture of the homeland. The language, customs, traditions, and values that have become defined as the pan-Indian identity is consumed by adult Bollywood viewers and, in some circles, it is considered an important method of maintaining one's cultural identity; however, it is an erroneous assumption that Bollywood's depiction of Indian values, language, customs, and traditions is typical to all South Asians, or even, all Indians. Herein lays the problem: the image of Indianness represented in Bollywood movies creates meanings for Western audiences, diasporic South Asian audiences, and for diasporic youth. The images that are depicted fail to represent the myriad faces, religions, cultures, and lived

experiences of the South Asian community that it represents. What is *not*

represented but is equally affected by the representations is an area of study that

must be examined, as the knowledge that is produced by Bollywood has the

power to define the identities of youth living in the diaspora.

As mentioned, knowledge is produced by systems of power. The

empowered groups control the knowledge that is produced and disseminated,

thus, controlling what people know. Thus, knowledge production is a political act

because it functions in the best interests of those in power. Edward Said's

Orientalist framework underscores how the dominant West portrays and

understands the subordinate East. Orientalist theory, argues that the West views

the East from a Eurocentric Christian perspective, where Asia is negatively

viewed as the 'Other' (Prashad, 2000). In the situation of Indian cinema, the

North Indian, upper-caste, upper class, Hindi speaking influence has dominated

the international scene, thus forming the South Asian international identity as a

North Indian elite image. While other cinemas in the South Asian subcontinent

exist from South India to Pakistan, their international reach does not rival that of

Bollywood and is therefore unable to add to the complexity of the identities from

the subcontinent. While Bollywood simultaneously redefines the definitions of

Indianness as it perpetuates it. It redefines the typical representation by adding

complexity for the South Asian case beyond what Apu from *The Simpsons*

delivers to Western audiences. The characters are developed, they are successful,

and they engage in a variety of emotions connected to serious or humourous plot

settings. However, the cinema perpetuates the definitions by grouping all South

Asians as one Other, effectively ignoring the micro level. Youth in the diaspora that do not identify with this North Indian Hindi speaking image suffer because of the lack of diversity in South Asian representations. The inability to locate a space for the diasporic youth experience is a problem that has yet to be resolved. From my own experience as a South Asian-Canadian, I continue to search for meaningful representations and aim toward discovering a diasporic identity representative of my lived experience.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Toward a diasporic identity

My childhood memories drift between Canadian and Christian observances like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and New Year's Eve to Indian, Hindu, Malayalee traditions like *Vishu*, *Onam*, and *Diwali*. I remember singing Christmas songs at our school concerts, sitting on Santa's lap in the mall and telling him what presents I wanted, waking up early in the morning on December 25th and running to the decorated tree to see what gifts I had received. I remember Easter egg hunts and stuffed turkeys. These memories are juxtaposed with being awakened before sunrise by my father who would cover my eyes and lead me stumbling to the *Vishu kanni*, opening my eyes to the sights of the Hindu deities, burning incense, rice, gold, and fire-lit lamps. I was told that this was our new year even though it was April and coincided with Easter. Our harvest season, *Onam*, was celebrated by performing the traditional dance called the *kaikottukali* at our community celebration events and eating rice, sambaar, kalan, papadam the traditional way – served on a banana leaf and using our bare right hand. Who am I? A Canadian? An Indian? Both? Neither?

I learned the importance of being Canadian from an early age. My parents spoke Malayalam, the language of the state of Kerala. My extended family, when all together, spoke a mixture of English and Malayalam. My mom's sisters, when talking to each other, spoke Tulu, a dialect from Mangalore, the city in South India where they were born and raised. The array of sounds floated through my ears and out, failing to form any meaning because my parents did not teach me the

languages of their childhoods. I spoke English and English only so as to not detriment my chances of success in school. English was the all access ticket to cultural capital and future accomplishments. They learned this early on with my older sister's first experience with the Canadian education system.

When my sister began junior kindergarten as the only nonwhite child in the class, my mother received a phone call from my sister's teacher. The teacher began the conversation by asking my mother what languages were spoken in the home. My mom replied honestly stating that she spoke Malayalam with her spouse and both English and Malayalam to my sister. The teacher expressed concerns with my sister's speech development, due to the stuttering problem she exhibited early on, attributing her difficulties to learning two languages. The result was that my sister was placed in an English as a Second Language class for her junior kindergarten year. The impact that this move had on my parents was significant; it taught them that academic success could not be achieved if my sister was receiving remedial help in the language of the country. They stopped speaking Malayalam to her and began their English only campaign in what they considered was their child's best interests. All of this occurred before I began my first words. 'Amma' was replaced with Mom; 'Accha' with Dad.   So, I learned to be Canadian before I can even remember from my parents' experiences with the education system. My parents' mother tongues would not be my own. The sounds of the words were foreign to me as much as they were a part of me. Their words became the dividing factor that would distinguish between Indian and Canadian. Indian was something I would never fully be because I did not have

full access to it. Canadian was something that I was, but could not yet understand because the popular definition associated it to something I was not – white or Christian.

Who am I? To revisit the question that plagues youth raised in the diaspora, an individual is a layering of all the experiences and influences that he or she encounters. There are no definitive answers for youth and young adults, like myself, who continue to piece together and develop our ever-shifting identities. Who I am will be constantly redefined as the path unfolds. Those individuals that strive to exclude the myriad influences that one encounters living in a diasporic community are denying the beauty of living in a space that allows for cultural exchanges and interactions. My life in Canada, though confusing and difficult to negotiate as a child and as an adult, is one that my parents and their ancestors did not live. My generation is adding layers to the communal identity as well as our individual identities. The story unfolds in a new direction that is representative of our ever increasing globalized world. Identities shift, take on new meanings, and are reborn much like the Hindu belief of birth and rebirth that guided me throughout my childhood.

The experience of being a South Asian youth living in a state of hybrid identity is confusing and difficult. For me, it felt like being the tennis ball in a fast paced game of tennis. The back and forth action of traveling from home to school and switching my behaviour and actions depending on who is watching is not uncommon for other young people. The South Asian experience of traveling back and forth is unique in that the experience feels like traveling across a

distance to another time and space. My parents moved to Canada over thirty

years ago. The values that they brought with them in the 1970s are what they

cling to now as the representation of Indian tradition. India, on the other hand,

has progressed in many ways, modernizing and moving in a new direction that is

different from the India my parents remember. In many ways, the traditional

values from the 1970s have not changed but in many ways they have. My parents,

being far removed from this cultural shift, continue to live in another era of Indian

traditions. When I meet new immigrants to Canada and see how liberal some of

the families are, I notice the difference in their upbringings and my own. At the

same time, I notice the similarities. While some young women may have more

freedom to go out with friends, drink alcohol, smoke, and return home just before

dawn, they still hide their romantic relationships from their parents. To return to

my question of what the experience of being in a state of hybridity is like for

South Asian youth, I can only say that not only is it confusing but it is almost

unique to the individual. I can generalize what the experience would feel like

based on what I have lived, but the varying degrees to which an individual is more

or less restricted by their parents or society depends on context.

      The experience of seeing images of South Asians in the media was

something that was exciting for me when I was young. At first, the only recurring

character that I saw was Apu from *The Simpsons*. Slowly, more South Asian

characters emerged. I used to feel excited when seeing these characters but as I

grew older, I became weary of their lack of development and purely stereotypical

representations. When a kid is rushed to a hospital in a movie, why do they get

treated by a young brown doctor with a heavy South Asian accent? Why is it that

when computer help is needed, there always seems to be an Asian character

around to fix it? And why is it that I find it weird when a South Asian character

on a television show does *not* have a heavily forced South Asian accent? Before

the movie *Harold and Kumar* and comedian Russell Peters became popular on

television and film, why is it that almost every South Asian character spoke with a

heavy accent? Why was that necessary to locate the character to the subcontinent

when there are thriving diasporas across the Western world – some dating back to

the early twentieth century? I began to ask myself these questions and grew

impatient with Western depictions of diasporic subjects. Not being able to relate

contributed to my feelings of alienation from the diaspora, because these

characters on television were grouped with my parents and their experience due to

the shared accents that situated them as immigrants. At a young age, there were

hardly representations of young people like myself born in the diaspora and

struggling to understand their identity.

When Bollywood began to explore the concept of the diasporic subject,

they often depicted youth born outside of India as spoiled, out of control, and out

of touch with their traditional values. The girls are often depicted as boy crazy,

wild and sex-crazed while the boys are never around the family or fulfilling the

duties of the son to take care of his parents. These images are also impossible to

relate to because while some of it may be true for youth in the various diasporas,

it is not my reality or that of any South Asian youth I grew up with. We often

tried harder to be more South Asian to grasp onto cultural practices and traditions

that constituted our ethnic identities. In my youth, I trained in classical Indian dance called *bharatnatyam*, briefly attended classical singing classes, went to the Hindu temple regularly and learned religious hymns to sing. Many of my young Indian friends did the same. When I saw how Bollywood was portraying youth in the diaspora, it disappointed me to see that not only did Hollywood misunderstand but so too did Bollywood. When I visited India a few years ago, many of my aunts and uncles marveled at how "well-behaved" and how immersed in Indian traditions I was. Apparently the diasporic subject of Hindi cinema was a true image for them. Their Canadian niece showed them otherwise.

Western and Eastern media's pedagogic influence is overpowering. The production of knowledge about what it means to be South Asian in the diaspora is dangerous when youth look to the media for guidance – directly or indirectly. As an Indo-Canadian, if I was surprised to see a South Asian character on a television show *without* an accent, what effect would this have on viewers that are not from a South Asian background? When people meet me, do they expect that I will have an accent? What knowledge has Western media produced about people from my cultural and ethnic background? Are we not Canadian as much as we are from somewhere else? Knowledge is power and the meaning that is created is meant to benefit those in power. By relegating South Asians on television to secondary roles, or assigning an accent to them, the knowledge that is produced is the lack of autonomy or visibility for South Asians in the Western world. The feeling of being an outsider in a country of immigrants is an interesting experience. When I am told by a Canadian of European descent that I should "go back to my

country", I feel as if the media has some influence in this response. When Western society constantly represents diasporic subjects as outsiders, they will continue to be outsiders in the eyes of mainstream society instead of feeling connected to this land as participators in its uprising.

My interest in uncovering the South Asian diasporic experience is not purely a selfish uncovering of my own identity. My interest also lies in my role as a teacher in a diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural setting. While progress is being made over the years in recruiting minority educators into the profession, the numbers are still disproportionately in favour of teachers of European descent. As such, it is necessary for me to reveal the experiences that many youth like myself face while growing up and provide educators with a sense of cultural understanding. When I was young, I did not have a single teacher that represented me or my background in the school system. It was only when I reached grade seven where I finally had a Punjabi Sikh science and math teacher. He wore a turban, tucked his beard in neatly, and he understood me. Later on in high school, I had a few more South Asian teachers and my parents always enjoyed meeting them at parent-teacher interview night. I still recall my father carrying the conversation in Tamil with Mr. Gunaratnam, my grade twelve math teacher. I was embarrassed instead of excited in an adolescent overreaction sort of way, but looking back at the experience now, I can say that the physical presence of teachers that would fully understand my experience was important to my psycho-social development.

As a newly hired educator, I feel a sense of responsibility. My responsibility as an educator is not merely related to literacy development and curriculum implementation. While concerned with these areas, I am drawn toward my duty as a critical educator to teach not only my students but my colleagues about a critical pedagogical approach to the teaching process. By engaging in a critical pedagogy, teachers can help students to not only develop the tools toward uncovering societal injustices that encourage change, but also, on a smaller scale, by connecting with every student on a personal level. A successful critical educator begins with the students and their lived experiences as important starting points toward accessing education. Every student brings forth valuable knowledge and we as educators must incorporate and make connections between what they already know and what needs to be learned in order to move forward. In this light, it is important for educators to understand where the students are coming from, not only for South Asian youth but all groups. I am not claiming that this is an easy task – let alone for a new teacher like myself who is still trying to figure everything out. However, I have realized that any effort to draw the students' lived experiences into the curriculum has engaged even the most disengaged students. I have taught politics to a class of fifteen-year-old students, mainly of Punjabi descent, and incorporated *bhangra* music into the lesson. The immediate interest that I sparked blew me away. Other attempts to draw my students into a lesson have failed but a critical educator does not give up. A critical educator fights for her students to allow access to the necessary tools to fight injustices. I refuse to teach the curriculum from a singular perspective. I will

draw upon a variety of sources from cultures across the world because the knowledges that are uncovered mean something more to the students when it comes from their personal background. It also helps students see the validity in their cultural backgrounds and allows schools to be the site for the amalgamation of cultures instead of the site of division. As for me, school was always an oppositional space from my home. Through critical pedagogy, schools can be sites where all cultures meet and encourage hybrid identities to develop positively, with the support of educated staff and peer groups.

As I draw this chapter to a close, I also draw to a close a short chapter of my life. The experience of researching and writing has awakened a new appreciation of academia in me. As a young girl, I remember telling my friends that I would *never* become a teacher. I asked myself, who in their right mind would want to be in school for the rest of their lives? As I grew up, I decided that teaching was my passion, but I would *never* do a masters degree. Who in their right mind would torture themselves with that much research? As I pushed on through my undergraduate degree and teacher training in local schools, I realized that I needed to do more work in my area of interest – and here I am. This whole process has taught me a lot about myself that I did not expect to learn. If I could go back to the eleven-year-old girl in front of the mirror with all that I now know - I would not stop her. The act of uncovering what is beneath has helped me to discover my present and is leading me into my future. So go on, scratch away.

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Glossary

Accha - father
Amma - mother
Bhangra – Punjabi music
Bharatnatyam - Classical Indian dance style
Bindi – a decorative sticker worn on the middle of a woman's forehead
Desi - Indian
Dhania – coriander
Diwali – Festival of lights
Han ji – Yes (respectfully)
Garam masala – a spice used in Indian cooking
Jeera - a spice used in Indian cooking
Kaikottukali – a traditional dance performed at Onam festivals
Kannada – a South Indian language spoken mainly in the state of Karnataka
Kalan – a South Indian curry
Kumkum powder – a red powder worn by Hindus during prayer time
Malayalam– a South Indian language spoken mainly in the state of Kerala
Malayalee – a person from Kerala
Memsahib – White woman (colonizer)
Onam – the harvest festival celebrated in Kerala
Papadam – a fried wafer typically consumed with rice
Roti – circular bread popular to North Indian cuisine
Sahib- White man (colonizer)
Sambaar – a South Indian curry
Samosa – an Indian appetizer
Sari – a traditional garment worn by South Asian women
Tabla – an Indian percussion instrument
Tamil – a Dravidian language spoken around the Indian subcontinent
Telegu – a South Indian language spoken mainly in the state of Andhra Pradesh
Turmeric – a spice used in Indian cooking
Vishu – the first day of the Malayalam New Year
Vishu kanni – the auspicious first sight of the Malayalam New Year.