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**NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN WOMEN OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**This thesis is an examination of the experiences of South Asian Canadian women in Thunder Bay and how they perceive and respond to the assumptions which dominant society holds about them. The focus of this thesis is an analysis of ways in which Canadian women of South Asian origin construct their identity in relation to the majority European Canadian society and the racism, stereotyping, and "othering" that they experience.**

**This thesis is based on 16 indepth interviews conducted in the city of Thunder Bay. Among the themes which are explored are: the flexibility and fluidity of identity; experiences of racism, othering, and stereotyping; different ways of constructing identity; and the relationship between gender roles and identity. The interviews were intended to elicit information on the participants' construction of identity in relationship to Puar's (1995) notion of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'," Euro-Canadian attitudes towards South Asian Canadians, and South Asian Canadians' perceptions of themselves. The terms adaptation and assimilation frequently used in the study of South Asian Canadian experience are found to be inadequate in understanding the women's experiences of racism, stereotyping, and "othering" and how they construct their own identity in relationship to these phenomena. To understand the different ways people construct their identity, one must closely examine the perceptions of people themselves for even in the face of the dominant 'gaze' identity remains flexible and fluid. One needs to look carefully at strategies and recognize that even when**

people are behaving in ways which appear to conform to dominant ideas and expectations, these may instead be instances of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" or other strategic ways of negotiating a minority identity which can only be understood through an analysis of respondents' own perceptions.

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## "Paki Go Home"

1.  
 3 pm  
 sunless  
 winter sleeping in the womb of the  
 afternoon  
 wondering how to say this  
 to reason or scream or cry or whisper  
 or write on the walls  
 reduced again  
 cut at the knees, hands chopped, eyes  
 blinded  
 mouth stopped, voices lost.

fear anger contempt  
 thin filaments of ice and fire  
 wire the bodies  
 my own, of hers, of his,  
 the young and the old.

And a grenade explodes  
 in the sunless afternoon  
 and words run down  
 like frothy white spit  
 down her bent head  
 down the serene parting of her dark hair  
 as she stands too visible  
 from home to bus stop to home  
 raucous, hyena laughter,  
 "Paki, Go Home!"

2.  
 the moon covers her face  
 Pock-marked and anxious  
 in the withered fingers of the winter  
 trees.  
 The light of her sadness runs like tears  
 down the concrete hills, tarmac rivers  
 and the gullies of the cities.  
 The wind still carries the secret chuckle  
 The rustle of canes  
 as black brown bodies flee into the night

blanched by the salt waters of the  
 moon.  
 Strange dark fruits on tropical trees  
 swing in the breeze gently.

3.  
 Now, and then again  
 we must organize.  
 The woman wiping the slur spit  
 from her face, the child standing  
 at the edge of the playground silent,  
 stopped.  
 the man twisted in despair,  
 disabled at the city gates.  
 Even the child in the womb  
 must find a voice  
 sound in unison  
 organize.  
 Like the song, like a roar  
 like a prophecy that changes the world.

To organize, to fight the slaver's dogs,  
 to find the hand, the foot, the tongue,  
 the body dismembered  
 organ by organ rejoined  
 organized

Soul breathed in  
 until she, he  
 the young, the old is whole.  
 Until the hand acts moved by the mind  
 and the walls, the prisons, the chains of  
 lead or gold  
 tear, crumble, wither into dust  
 and the dead bury the dead  
 until yesterdays never return.

("Paki Go Home," Himani Bannerji. In  
The Geography of Voice. Diane  
 McGifford, ed. pp.5-7, 1992).

No one is more "Canadian" than another. On the contrary, it is possible to conceive that individuals may be more consciously Canadian because they have made a deliberate choice to be here rather than simply being Canadian by accident of birth (James and Shadd 1994:4).

"Go home Paki," it read, "back to India where you came from."

I was trembling with rage and tears and I found myself unable to go near the locker. It would be so embarrassing if anyone realized that those words were for me. I wasn't even from Pakistan. Besides, Pakistanis aren't from India, anyway. All sorts of thoughts were flashing through my mind - I was trying to console myself but it wasn't working (Jaffer 1994:59).

We lived in downtown Toronto at that time. I still can't get over the fact that children of many races, Chinese, caucasian and Black, found me an object of ridicule. I dressed like them, my English was at times even better than theirs (my accent wasn't that pronounced, even then) and yet they called me names and rejected me. It just served to bring home the fact that everyone thought I was distasteful. I cried each and every day of my first three months in Canada. I was too ashamed to tell my mom. How could I, when I had spoken to her with so much enthusiasm about how much I would like school here? I had boasted to her that I would be the smartest in my class (Jaffer 1994:58).

## **CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 AIM OF THE THESIS**

Much has been written about the lives of South Asian immigrants to Canada, their work experiences, and their living experiences (see, for example, Moghaddam, Taylor, and Lalonde 1989; and Ralston 1988). However, until recently, very little attention has been paid to the way in which people of South Asian origin construct their own identities, the emphasis they place on their cultural values, and whether they feel a strong sense of reasserting those values. Many assumptions promoted by the theory of assimilation are made about racial minority groups, but their own perspectives are not frequently considered. Dominant European feminism has also recently begun to address issues of concern to non-European women, however, it too often represents them as a homogeneous category and addresses them in a very limited fashion (Mohanty 1995:259). Such an approach does not consider how people create their own identity. According to many post-colonial writers, what the majority European people see in India or the Indian diaspora, for example, is based on their own ethnocentric attitudes, and has nothing to do with how Indian migrants view themselves or their world. Their perception of themselves as immigrants, or second or third generation immigrants in Britain, Canada, or the United States, for example, may be quite different from dominant representations (Puar 1995).

Recent post-colonial literature has addressed the issues of representation and identity in an effort to understand how people of South Asian origin maintain a distinct South Asian identity over several generations. It also explores the process of

responding to and resisting hegemonic European values in such a way that a person appears to be conforming to the dominant European society's values when in reality the person is forming a new strategically-reactive identity. Termed "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" by Puar (1995), such a notion of identity, instead of being an assimilationist identity, is a strategically reactive identity which is neither the stereotypical South Asian identity, nor a 'white' identity (Puar 1995:27).

The main aim of this thesis is to identify and understand the perspectives of Canadian women of South Asian origin in Thunder Bay, Ontario. It has been noted by post-colonial writers that non-European women's experiences have not been given much attention in the Canadian literature. They have either been excluded from the discourse, or represented as "victims" (Agnew 1996:101). I explore the phenomenon of "oppositionally active 'whiteness,'" and other forms of identity construction. By doing so I hope to understand how South Asian Canadian women in Thunder Bay construct their identity in relation to the assumptions of majority Euro-Canadian society. Under the notion of identity, I will also examine how these women look at their economic participation and their role in the family; how their roles are similar to, or different from, previous generations; whether they see themselves as similar to, or different from, women of European origin in Canada; and, how they integrate their cultural identity with their gender identity.

This research will contribute to the ongoing critique of the assimilationist model, a model which ignores the fact that identity is a processual phenomenon rather than a static object, or state of being that can be lost. Such knowledge is necessary in a

multicultural society where people of different cultural backgrounds must be sensitive to the perspectives of others and where dreams of some future state of cultural homogeneity - when all the 'others' have been assimilated - are endlessly frustrated.

### **1. Feminism and Post-Colonialism**

Post-colonial writers have criticized feminism for not adequately addressing issues of racism, and issues of differences. Vijay Agnew (1993) points out that even though there is supposed to be more attention to diversity of women's issues, it has not been very well addressed in recent works. She criticizes feminist theory for focusing too centrally on gender issues and not equally addressing issues of ethnicity (Agnew 1993:144). According to her, feminist practices tend to "reproduce the relations of domination and subordination in the larger society, focussing on issues of interest to bourgeois Anglo-Saxon women" (1993:144). Although feminists have recognized the need to look at issues of racism along with gender issues, such recognition has not gone beyond the point of identification of this link. Instead of exploring how race and gender intersect in the lives of women, 'white' feminists have tended to focus on issues that affect them personally. Although gender issues are common to all women, non-European women are affected more by racism in their lives as "racism determines their position in the labor market, influences their communication and interaction, and inhibits their struggle against sexism" (Agnew 1993:145). According to her, class is interlinked with gender and race, and the three things in their own way cannot be separated from one another (Agnew 1996).

Vijay Agnew argues that the reason non-European women have been absent

from feminist practice is because of their class, race, and immigrant status and not because of their culture and values (1993:226). Feminist debates and concerns, according to her, have been defined by bourgeois Anglo Saxon women and reflect their ethnocentric biases. The ethnocentric biases of 'white' feminists can be traced back to the first wave of feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Canada. Non-European women appear in their writings either in "exotic and dependent roles," as for example, in the context of white slavery and prostitution in the case of Chinese women, and crime and sale as slaves in the case of black women, or, with reference to aid provided by Canadian female missionaries "to their 'sisters' in India" (Agnew 1993:220). Although white feminists have spoken against a male discourse which treats women as 'objects,' non-European women appear in the writings of the first wave feminism exactly as that: "The women were portrayed as objects of the good will of others, not as active participating subjects in their own history" (Agnew 1993:220). The presence of racial bias can be felt more strongly in the writings of missionaries who considered their cultural values as superior to the cultural values of the women that they worked with: "The objects of their activity were never considered social equals, and there was no sympathy based on gender" (Agnew 1993:220). The theory and practice of North American feminism during this period existed in and reproduced a racist culture, and excluded non-European women from the women's movement. Their work reflected class and race biases of the period and these biases were manipulated by the women to promote their own struggles. Arguments used for female suffrage, for example, reflect many of these attitudes (Agnew 1993:221). Writings of non-European feminists



such as Mohanty and Parmar point towards the presence of ethnocentric biases among first-wave Western feminists which continues into present day feminist scholarship through its frequent stereotype of non-European women as powerless and victims of their own oppressive cultures (Agnew 1993:220).

Unlike the explicit racism of first-wave feminism the racism of second wave feminism is systemic. It appears in the absence and exclusion of issues of concern to non-European women and inclusion of "issues, interests, and perspectives of white middle-class women, centring on sexuality, family, and socialization" (Agnew 1993:221). In the early part of the second wave (the 1970's) non-European women remained absent from women's movement. Feminist writings remained under the influence of class and race biases of the larger society (Agnew 1993:221). Feminists of this period focused on gender and gender oppression as a basis of solidarity and sisterhood, thereby excluding non-European women whose lives were affected by race, class, and gender. In the latter part of the second wave (the 1980's) non-European women's position changed from being absent to being marginal (Agnew 1993:223). Although differences of race and class began to receive recognition by feminists of this period, their interpretation and inclusion in feminist theory remains problematic because the focus remains on gender oppression. As Vijay Agnew explains,

The absence from feminist literature of the different experience of women whose lives are influenced not only by gender but also by race and class indicates the lack of weight given to their experience in reaching an overall understanding of the ways in which gender, race, and class intersect in the lives of women of color (1993:224).

Himani Bannerji (1995) also addresses these issues and points out that it is not

just that feminists have overlooked issues of diversity, but that they have placed limitations on the voice given to 'other' women within those debates. She criticizes the practice within feminist debates by which non-white women's presences are rendered textually invisible, they are "denied real agency and [their] lives are constructed as peripheral to the everyday workings of society" (Bannerji 1995:66). Discussing the epistemologies used in feminist literatures Bannerji also talks about the general category 'woman' as problematic. According to her, this denotes universalism of womanhood, and therefore reduces all women to identical subjectivities. Within this category all women are seen as equally oppressed by the patriarchal nature of society and oppression becomes their common experience. The result of such a tendency is the neglect of another important issue, namely the role of women as oppressors. Bannerji asserts that because of these limitations feminism ends up representing only privileged women: "Feminist theory provides a friendly home for white middle-class privilege and concerns" (1995:70). Although white feminists are aware of many of these issues and have begun to include non-white women's perspectives, the question remains as to how much room they have left for 'other' voices. In addition, there is also the question of how those 'different' voices are being incorporated. The inclusion of non-white women's perspectives in feminist analysis is not without difficulties. Instead of being incorporated centrally into the social analysis of women's experiences these voices often get presented as unique, or, different personal experiences.

Bannerji points out two strategies within feminism which contribute to the above mentioned problems: 'essentialism' with its emphasis on universality, and 'particularism'

with its emphasis on difference. Although essentialism is becoming less and less a part of feminist theorizing, the problems within feminism still exist but are of a slightly different nature now. The emphasis on 'essentialism' has been replaced with 'particularism.' Thus, one problematic strategy has been replaced with another problematic strategy. Instead of extending non-white women's experiences beyond personal experiences to a social analysis which can draw links between the experience of privileges for some people and oppression of others, present day feminism and its strategy of 'particularism' emphasizes "multiple personalities within one subject" (Bannerji 1995:70) The result of such strategies is that 'different' gets presented as divergence from the norm. Bannerji discusses the racism hidden within such strategies by pointing out that although white feminists have differences among themselves, they do not use the argument of 'difference' when presenting their own experiences. According to Bannerji (1993) when non-white women's experiences are included in feminism it is done in the name of multiculturalism. The inclusion defeats its purpose because it is done by emphasizing the difference with the use of "adjectivized boundaries, such as 'black' poetry, 'visible minority' prose writings, 'women of colour' politics, 'black' feminism, etc." (Bannerji 1993:xv).

## **2. Being at Home in One's Skin: Representations and Resistance**

May Yee (1993) writes about the experiences of non-white people in Canada. According to her, even though they may be born and raised in Canada, non-white people cannot totally identify with the country of their birth. Yee asserts that the expression "at home in one's skin," which is taken for granted by most people in this

society, certainly is not true if that skin is not white (Yee 1993:15). Non-white people do not experience 'at homeness' because of the racism that comes out in seemingly innocent but assumption-laden questions like: "Where do you come from?," or "Do you speak English?" Yee refers to this kind of racism as "'educated' racism" (1993:15). According to her, this kind of racism knows not to "call a spade a spade," yet it is obvious in white people's tone of voice when they talk to non-white people, their patronizing manner, their limited choice of small talk, (for example, Chinese food as a favourite topic), as well as in the difficulties that non-white people face in getting jobs, difficulty in getting promotions, finding a home, and so on. These, according to her, are all issues of racism as well as issues of power and privilege.

### **3. Stereotypical Images of Non-European People and their Cultures**

Yee (1993) discusses the experiences of Chinese women and other Asian women in Canada. According to her, Asian women are stereotyped as passive, exotic, and sexually available. Asian women are often judged by their stereotypes and have to face accusations, for example, of being too aggressive, even by those who are more aggressive themselves. Stereotypes of a different nature are terms such as "oreo" (brown on the outside, white on the inside), or "apple," or "banana," and so on, that signify the identity crisis all non-white kids have to go through (Yee 1993:27).

South Asian women are often stereotyped as oppressed, and their cultures are represented as patriarchal and oppressive. Stereotypical images of Indian women and the role of British women in creating and/or perpetuating those images can be traced back to the period of India's colonization. Vron Ware (1992) discusses the

representation of Indian women during this era. She characterizes the image of Indian women in the minds of the British colonists as one of intense suffering, and discusses feminist portrayals of Hindu women as victims of "barbaric cultural customs from which they needed help to escape" (Ware 1992:129). The veil, arranged marriages, and the dowry system were often given as examples of 'primitive' and backward customs. Societies that practised these customs were portrayed as backward and needing to be civilized.

Many British feminists went to India during colonization to help Indian women improve their condition in Indian society. However, they ended up projecting their own ideas of womanhood on women in India. They looked at Indian culture from their own ethnocentric perspective and applied harsh moral judgements to the cultural practices of Indian people. To many of these British women, the way the Indian women dressed, the colour of their clothes, the jewellery that they wore, were all suggestive of sexuality and sexual subordination (Ware 1992:139).

Edward Said (1978 ) writes about the 'othering' of people who are not from the hegemonic European culture and also the stereotypical way the west represents the east. Discussing the east broadly he writes about the contrasting romantic and exotic representations of the east on the one hand, and the extremely negative stereotypes on the other. Said shows that this orientalist discourse is dominated by western images and ideals, and reflects very little about how people in other communities view themselves, or how they perceive the world.

Inderpal Grewal (1996) points out the problems with the fiction that is used to

illustrate South Asian immigrant experience in many American Studies programs, such as postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and women's studies.

According to her, the literature chosen to represent South Asian immigrant experiences often provides a very stereotypical sense of that experience. This kind of literature is usually part of the "discourse of 'freedom'" which constructs South Asian women as working hard to escape India and its 'oppressive' culture, and move to America "the land of hope, freedom and independence for women" (Grewal 1996:59). Seen in this light, the immigration process comes to be looked at as a movement from "oppression" to "liberation," which in turn gives validation to the hegemonic discourse of immigration to the west (Grewal 1996:59).

#### **4. South Asians: a Homogeneous Category?**

South Asians are usually looked at as a homogeneous category. Jasbir K. Puar (1995) examines how this categorization affects Sikh women in Britain. According to her, in a world of 'white' dominance, everything is constructed as 'other' in relationship to whiteness. People do not talk about Asianness as something unto itself. When it is talked about in the dominant discourse, it is talked about as other than 'white.' South Asian people are presumed to be a category on the basis of not being the dominant. Such categorization ignores all kinds of variations within the category that is being defined as 'the other.' The term 'visible minorities' is also a problematic term. As Himani Bannerji puts it, "All people, black or white, South Asian or Scandinavian are visible. So in what way are we more visible than others?" (1993:181). Bannerji asserts that the category 'visible minorities' is really based on the notion of "different,"

"does not belong," "not like us," and "not normal" (1993:182). Under this category variations in history and culture are overlooked. She maintains that the term 'visibility' has an implication of inferiority or inadequacy.

South Asian women are identified and categorized by the notion "colour equals culture" which portrays these women as victims of their own 'sexist' culture (Puar 1995:24). Chandra Talpade Mohanty refers to this as the construction of the "monolithic 'Third World Woman'" (quoted in Puar 1995:24). Mohanty maintains that the construction of a homogeneous category of woman with the same interests and desires results in the assumption of a universal state of patriarchy. Variations in terms of class, religion, and culture are ignored. The monolithic notion of the 'third world woman' results in the image of what Mohanty refers to as the "average third world woman" who is then stereotyped as "sexually constrained," "ignorant," "tradition-bound," "domestic," "family-oriented," "victimized," and so on (1991:56, 72). However, western feminists' own representation of themselves is often the opposite. They see, and represent, themselves as "modern," "educated," "free to make their own decisions," and "having control over their own bodies and sexualities" (Mohanty 1995:261).

Because of the notion "colour equals culture," the wearing of a certain kind of clothing, the use of veil, and sexism all become a presumption of the experiences and of the victimization of these women regardless of their own individual experiences. At the same time, any kind of awareness of the cultural context of those practices is also ignored. Asian culture seems more patriarchal to the dominant European society because the focus on cultural practices, along with an essentialized notion of culture

draws attention away from similarities (Puar 1995:24).

### **5. Inter-generational Cultural Conflict and the Desire for a Fixed Identity**

The question of cultural conflict is another area through which the discourse of the otherness of Asians gains strength. Second generation women of South Asian origin are portrayed by the media as "involved in intense, soul-searching battles over their identities, loyalties, and feelings of belonging" (Puar 1995:25). This supposed cultural conflict puts this generation in an either/or framework. The assumption is that for the sake of mental and emotional well-being, these women have to choose either the hegemonic European culture, or the South Asian culture (Puar 1995:25).

An element of the stereotype of South Asians is that these 'other' cultures are riven by inter-generational cultural conflicts. The assumption hidden behind such stereotypes is that it is only in these 'other' cultures that inter-generational conflicts exist. That conflicts between generations exist in any culture, including the hegemonic European culture, is ignored. The discourse of the inter-generational cultural conflicts of 'other' cultures is often accompanied by the assumption that the only way to resolve those conflicts is through a new kind of assimilationist, fixed identity. It ignores the fact that identity is flexible and fluid. The question of resolving the contradictions does not necessarily arise, because at times people find some parts of those contradictions to be problematic and other times to be acceptable, which is all part of a certain normal process (Puar 1995). Moreover, the desire for a fixed identity has its roots in the racism that makes non-white people wish for a fixed identity (Bannerji 1993:xxiii).

The assumed identity conflict constructs women of South Asian origin first as



victims of their own backward, patriarchal, oppressive culture and extended family, and second, as longing to assimilate with dominant European society. It is assumed that second generation women of South Asian origin are "craving all that the west has to offer" (Puar 1995:26) which they are denied by their own cultures . Those that rebel are seen to be far more liberated than the others who are assumed to be obedient. The seemingly obedient, traditional ones are seen as lacking the courage to assert their independence.

### **6. Interracial Marriages: A Symbol of Assimilation?**

Interracial marriages are looked upon as the symbol of a final assimilation into white society: "The strict, inflexible, patriarchal, extended South Asian family is seen by the white gaze<sup>1</sup> as the scapegoat; westernized daughters are rebelling against their own culture" (Puar 1995:42). According to Puar, while interracial relationships raise questions about access to privileges and protection from racism, they do not, however, mean assimilation. Interracial relationships are seen by the dominant European society as acts of rebellion. The assumption here is that the second-generation South Asian woman is rebelling against her family and views 'white' men as more desirable. It is also presumed that these women, along with the others who are presumably less liberated, view 'arranged marriages' as "horribly debilitating and oppressive," and that those who rebel either run away or are thrown out of their family and are rejected by their community (Puar 1995:43).

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<sup>1</sup>. As will be discussed later, "the gaze" is a term from Foucault (1977) which refers to the way in which individuals become watched or surveyed initially by society and eventually by themselves.

Similar assumptions are also made in western movies such as Mississippi Masala, the story of a second-generation South Asian woman, Mina, raised in the United States. This movie portrays Mina as a strong-willed westernized woman, who finds freedom only through a love affair with a non-South Asian man and the rejection of her family as a consequence. With such a theme this movie recommends a very dangerous and unrealistic solution for the identity 'problems' of South Asian women. The message that they get from it is "run away with your non-South Asian lover and you will be free and your problems will be solved" (Puar 1995:29).

### **7. Strategic Functioning in the Politics of Everyday Life**

The oppositional either/or constructs in which non-European people are placed by the dominant European society necessitate strategic functioning in the politics of everyday life. Writing about the experiences of non-white children, Yee (1993) observes that most second generation kids grow up wanting to be 'white' because they do not want to be 'the other.' They try to fit in the white dominated schools and universities. This fitting in might include denying the knowledge of one's mother tongue, avoiding one's own parents in public, and avoiding other non-white kids at school (1993:23).

Frantz Fanon (1967) discusses the experience of black people in a society where white people consider themselves superior. According to him, blacks living in a white dominated society also come to view themselves as inferior and desire to be 'white.' In his discussion of black people Fanon also includes other colonized peoples who, because of colonial attitudes, have been made to develop an inferiority complex

and try hard to behave like 'white' people. They do it in several ways which may include rejecting their dialect, or dissociating themselves from those non-white communities that are considered to be more inferior than their own. The more they try to resemble 'whites' in their behaviour, the more 'white' they appear to themselves. However, their inferiority complex increases because within the dominant 'white' society they are always looked upon as 'blacks' first.

Another example of how people respond is the attempt to physically make themselves resemble majority whites through manipulations of the body. Eugenia Kaw (1994) writes about the negative stereotypical portrayals of physical features of Chinese women. According to her, the negative portrayals of people of racial minorities create in them a desire to have a physical appearance more like the majority 'white' population. Women of racial minorities often feel that they have to measure up to ideals of beauty in 'white' dominated society. Although they are aware of the racial stereotypes of themselves and of other Asians, they have internalized these negative images and judge their bodies as well as the bodies of other Asians "with the critical eye of the oppressor" (Kaw 1994:260). This may lead to the use of cosmetic surgery, such as double eyelid surgery or nose surgery in the case of Chinese women, in an effort to make their bodies and physical features conform to dominant ideals of 'white' beauty.

Many other ways of strategic functioning have been discussed by Puar (1995). According to her, part of how people cope is by incorporating elements from both cultures. Recent British literature points to a new South Asian 'subculture' which

combines aspects of Asian and British cultures. Some examples are a genre of music in Britain which combines elements of English popular music with classical Indian music, and certain styles of clothing that combine eastern and western fashion trends. However, as Puar points out, such a synthesizing of the two cultures may not always be possible or desirable (1995:27).

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**

This thesis is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews with members of the South Asian Canadian community in Thunder Bay. Interviews were conducted with 16 first and second-generation Canadian women of South Asian origin between May and July 1996. The ages of the respondents ranged from 20 years to 53 years.

Some of the participants were selected from the list of the South Asian Canadian community who belong to the 'India Canada Association' in Thunder Bay. Members were selected by phone to determine those families who had first and/or second-generation women who were willing to be part of the study. Additional respondents were acquired through personal contacts. For the purposes of this thesis an arbitrary designation was made as to who qualifies as second generation. People who came after the age of thirteen were treated as first generation, and people who came at the age of thirteen or before, or who were born in Canada, were treated as second generation. The reason for this division was that people who come at, or before thirteen may be more similar to people who are born here in terms of their experiences and perceptions because of the fact that they still have to grow to maturity in Canada,

and therefore are socialized by the same school system.

During each call, the purpose of the study was made explicit, questions were answered, and a time and place for the interview were fixed. Before starting the interview the respondents were given a covering letter and a consent form discussing the reason for the research. Also made explicit to them was the fact that participation in this study was strictly voluntary and that any information that they provide will be kept completely confidential. Respondents were also told that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to, and could withdraw consent at any time.

While not a random sample, care was taken to ensure that the respondents chosen were from different parts of India. Initially I had contacted 20 people. Out of those, four refused to participate due to time constraints. I found that the fact that I am a member of the community and spoke the languages of the respondents' choice helped me a great deal in contacting people for the interviews. Participants were given the choice of doing the interviews in Punjabi, Hindi, or English. One respondent did the interview in Punjabi, another one in Hindi, and two respondents switched back and forth between Hindi and English. The remainder of the respondents chose to do the interview in English.

Most of the respondents were happy to answer all of the questions, and even expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about what they have been feeling and experiencing for years. One of the second generation women made the comment, "It's about time that somebody did something like this." By contrast, one first generation

woman seemed very defensive while answering questions, and another did not want to answer a few of the questions and answered "no comments there." One question that seemed to elicit this response was, "How do you perceive Euro-Canadians?" to which a few respondents' first answer was, "They are very nice," or, "I have no problems with them." Once I clarified with the respondents that they could discuss positive as well negative perceptions they were more forthcoming.

On the whole, the second-generation women sounded very pleased to be able to talk about these issues, and the first-generation women became more comfortable as the interview progressed. Initially, one respondent was uncomfortable with the idea of using the tape-recorder. This respondent asked if it was possible to write down the answers instead of tape-recording them. I explained to her that since the interview would be in a discussion format it would be difficult to write down everything of importance. I also assured the respondent that if she still felt uncomfortable after starting the interview I would definitely discontinue its use. Since the respondent did not make any further request to discontinue the use of tape-recorder I tape-recorded the whole interview. Most of the respondents were alone at the time of the interview. In some cases, where because of the time of the interview families were present, husbands or parents took the children away and made sure that the respondents were not disturbed. Four of the respondents found it more convenient to do the interviews at my house instead of theirs.

Based on a review of secondary source literature on South Asians in Canada, Britain, and the United States, an interview schedule consisting of demographic

questions, questions about ethnicity and ethnic identity, and questions about gender and gender roles was developed and used as a guide. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix A. Starting with basic demographic questions such as name, age, and birth place, the interview schedule moved on to questions about the immigration process, presence of family or extended family members in Canada, and so on. These questions were meant to generate some background information about respondents in terms of who they interacted with and the structure of their family. The next set of questions addressed ethnic background and preferences in clothing, food, friends, language, participation in community functions, and marriage. Finally, I discussed ideas about gender and gender roles.

The main aim of the interviews was to look for themes in order to bring out the commonalities and the differences between the South Asian and the majority European cultures. The interviews also focused on the similarities and differences between first-generation and second-generation women in order to find out how they construct their own identities in relationship to the assumptions of the dominant society.

The interviews ranged in length from an hour to an hour and a half. The majority of them were an hour in length. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. For the analysis, different themes were sifted out of the transcribed material. I was searching particularly for themes related to how people respond and construct their identity in relationship to the assumptions that the dominant society has about their cultures, and whether they feel that the assumptions are correct or incorrect.

A variety of secondary source literature from different fields, including sociology

and anthropology, was used to provide a context. My secondary source review focused primarily on literature dealing with constructions of identity and otherness, and experiences of migration. Some of the literature was chosen on the basis of themes suggested by the respondents. These themes include: experiences of racism, impact of racism, not acknowledging the presence of racism as a way of constructing identity, denial of the presence of any racism as a way of retaining internal identity, and absorption of racial stereotypes by racial minority people themselves.

Additional insights were provided by living in the community and interacting with its members. I kept a diary of everyday events to find out what people say it means to be an Asian Canadian, and the problems of trying to maintain that idea in the hegemonic European-derived culture they are living in. Living in this culture, and being part of the Asian Canadian community in Thunder Bay, gave me access to people in informal settings in terms of their modes of presentation, interactions, informal discussions, and some of the situations in which people are confronted by identity issues.

My aim was to find out how people consciously present themselves and their cultures in different settings. While studying people at cultural events, I observed how they present themselves and their cultures formally in bulletins, posters, newsletters and so on, and informally, in the way they dress, or the kind of issues that they discuss. The purpose was to find out if there is a difference between how people present themselves and their cultures in formal settings, and how this compares and contrasts with informal settings. Information collected in this way was also useful in making



comparisons between what people say in formalized interviews, and in other formal and informal settings.

Although care was taken to ensure that the sample is varied, it remains a small sample. This is in part because of the small South Asian Canadian population in Thunder Bay. According to the 1991 census data<sup>2</sup>, the population of the Indo-Canadian community in Thunder Bay was 85. Therefore, there are limitations to generalizing from this data. Another limitation of this thesis is the age range of interviewees which is from 20 years to 53 years. Perhaps if I had been able to interview older women I might have got different responses. Similarly, more variation in terms of region of origin might have produced different responses. Also, one of the issues that I have not centrally addressed is the issue of class which writers such as Himani Bannerji (1995) have emphasized. Although the study included both working class and middle class respondents the majority of the respondents were from middle and upper middle class families. However, in the analysis of data there were no obvious class differences in responses. A study of this nature could be enhanced by a follow up of a much larger sample, or perhaps a sample of different communities. Bannerji (1995) has pointed out the need to look at class in relation to gender and culture which is something that could be done in a future study with a larger South Asian Canadian community. However, this study can provide important insights into

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<sup>2</sup>. We must be aware that problems have been pointed out with the census data. It has been pointed out that there maybe confusion around Indigenous people of Canada and Indian Canadians from India. Also, in the case of second-generation people, the place of birth may have been Canada, but they may have been of Indian descent.

issues of identity maintenance among a small isolated community in a relatively small town as very few studies have done that. The absence of the cultural supports which larger minority communities have adds to the problems of identity maintenance, reproduction, and change in such settings.

### **1.3 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

As the use of terms such as 'race' and 'racism' is contested within the social sciences, it is important to clarify my own use of terminology in this thesis. According to Robert Miles (1989), 'race' and 'racial' are problematic terms. Miles argues that race is not a valid scientific concept, but rather an ideological one. As he points out, the term has historically gone through many different changes. Now, in Europe, North America, and Australia, race is often used to denote skin colour and not the other phenotypical features such ear shape, length of arms and legs, and so on, that it once referred to. Furthermore, the current inclusion of certain populations previously considered "distinct 'races'" in the category 'white' shows that 'race' is not a valid biological concept, but just an ideological one (1989:71). Because of its analytical ideological connotations, Miles argues that the term should not be used in sociological analysis.

On the other hand, Paul Gilroy (1987), while agreeing that race is an ideological product, argues that for some people their racial identity is very important. It has meaning for them not necessarily in a scientific or biological sense, but rather as a common ground for struggles, and because it is part of the popular culture of how people are assessed and self identify (Gilroy 1987:22-24). Following Gilroy's

reasoning, I use the notion 'race' because it is a commonly used term, and has meaning for the subjects of my research as will be shown.

As well, I have tended to use terms such as 'dominant European society,' 'hegemonic European culture,' and 'majority European society' in place of terms such as 'mainstream' society, and 'mainstream' culture. I have done this keeping in mind the fact that Canada does have a dominance of British and French traditions, and that these European ethnic groups dominate the political institutions. Therefore, it is a kind of hegemonic dominance that these ethnic groups have over other ethnic groups. Also, when the term 'mainstream' gets used in popular discourse, there is an assumption that everybody knows what it means, and agrees with it. As such, there are connotations to this term which are not necessarily correct. It is often not recognized that ultimately this term is just an ideological construction.

When used throughout my thesis, the terms 'majority' and 'minority' do not refer to a group's numerical status. According to Bolaria and Li (1985), "Minorities are groups which are in a subordinate position, dominated by groups which have power to subject them to unequal treatment. Conversely, a majority group is the group that has the power to dominate" (1985:15). In this sense, the terms 'minority' and 'majority' represent an unequal power relationship and not numerical status.

Use of terms such as 'visible minority,' and 'women of colour,' has also been avoided precisely because of the criticism of these terms by post-colonial writers such as Himani Bannerji and Vijay Agnew. Himani Bannerji (1993), as discussed previously, criticizes the term 'visible minorities' on the grounds that it presents some people as

'different' from the norm and categorizes them on the basis of physical appearance.

Vijay Agnew (1996) discusses the wide use of the term 'women of colour' in feminist literature and points out its limitations. According to her, although this term unites people with a history of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, against white supremacy and racism, it is problematic because it categorizes people with different histories, traditions, and struggles, and may be understood by some people as taking away their right to their own identity and uniqueness (1996:107).

Didi Khayatt (1994) is another writer who has discussed the problems associated with these terms. She points towards the assumptions implicit in the categories of "immigrant woman," "woman of colour," and "visible minority" that not only homogenize people with real differences in experience, but also do not differentiate between different levels of oppression (1994:81).

Thus, I have tended not to use these terms except when discussing the work of other writers who use them. Instead, I have preferred the use of the terms 'European,' 'Euro-Canadian,' 'non-European,' 'minority,' and 'majority.' I have often used the terms South Asian and Indian interchangeably.

### Defining Racism

Article 2 of the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice adopted in the general conference of UNESCO, held in Paris on 27 November 1978 defines racism as follows:

Racism includes racist ideologies, prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behaviour, structural arrangements and institutionalized practices resulting in racial inequality as well as the fallacious notion that discriminatory relations between groups are morally and scientifically justifiable; it is reflected in discriminatory provisions in legislation or regulations and discriminatory practices as well as in

anti-social beliefs and acts; it hinders the development of its victims, perverts those who practise it, divides nations internally, impedes international co-operation and gives rise to political tensions between peoples; it is contrary to the fundamental principles of international law and, consequently, seriously disturbs international peace and security (UNESCO 1978:4 quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:20).

According to Didi Khayatt (1994), racism "is not only a recognition of difference, but also the explicit emphasis on difference to mediate hierarchy based on colour, ethnicity, language and race" (1994:83).

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The focus of this thesis is to identify the perspectives of Canadian women of South Asian origin in an effort to understand how they construct their identity in relation to the assumptions, 'othering,' stereotyping, and racism by dominant European Canadian society. I hope to explore how important ethnic identity is by comparing first-generation and second-generation South Asian Canadian women in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Regardless of their own experiences they are presumed to be a unified category on the basis that they are not the 'dominant.' In my opinion, it is important to get a sense of how people constitute their own sense of identity, and not to presume that they are a homogeneous group, or that their identity is fixed and static. This case study will provide an opportunity to explore that particular experience in a detailed way in a local setting. By doing so I hope to make a contribution to the fields of postcolonial and women's studies in sociology, and to challenge the racist assumptions underlying the theories of assimilation.

#### **1.5 PLAN OF THE THESIS**

Chapter Two introduces the theoretical orientations of the thesis. A review of

comparative literature on the representation of people of South Asian origin, immigration of South Asians, and a history of racism in Canada, is presented and discussed. I argue that while previous approaches to the study of South Asian Canadians make an important contribution, they fail to examine how people construct their own identity when faced with racism, stereotyping, and othering. I suggest that one of the reasons for this omission is reliance on an ethnic/assimilation model which, according to Bolaria and Li (1985), "entails obvious theoretical flaws and ideological bias" (1985:14). Moreover, most of these studies either do not include women, or study women in stereotypical roles and fail to express their lived experience adequately. I propose that an appropriate level of analysis needs to be more refined and nuanced to understand how people of South Asian origin construct their identity.

Chapter Three is a summary of my research in the South Asian Canadian community in Thunder Bay. The concept of identity with its different aspects is elaborated. I discuss the respondents' experiences of racism, othering, and stereotyping, and different forms of identity construction as a result of those experiences. Detailed statements from the informants, and some case studies are presented to illustrate the experience of racism and the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness.'"

In Chapter Four, the relationship between gender roles and identity is discussed. Women's roles as discussed by respondents are described. Detailed statements from the respondents are used to illustrate how they perceive their roles in the family, how their roles are similar to, or different from, previous generations, whether they see their roles as similar to, or different from, the roles of women in Euro-Canadian society, and how they

integrate their ethnic identity with their gender identity.

In Chapter Five, comparative literature on identity and different forms of constructing identity when faced with racism are examined. The role of media in reproducing stereotypes is discussed.

Chapter Six is a summation of the arguments presented in the thesis, and suggests some directions for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO - THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding discussion in Chapter One illustrates how 'othering' within the dominant European culture denies and suppresses understanding of the lived reality of non-European women's lives and aspirations. Indeed, it may generate a subjective desire on the part of the 'other' to deny their own history and become 'white.' Yet, as Puar suggests, there are other possibilities. We need a more refined and nuanced understanding of identity. The work of Foucault offers some useful tentative beginnings.

### **2.2 SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY, AND THE NOTION OF THE SELF**

According to Foucault, knowledge, which is the particular view of the world prevailing in a culture at any one time, is intimately bound up with power. Under what right or obligation it is possible for one perspective to define another, or for one person to act in one way and not another, is determined by the version of events currently taken as 'knowledge.' Therefore, the power to act in a particular way depends upon the 'knowledge' prevailing in a society. One can exercise power by drawing upon discourses which allow the actions to be represented in an acceptable light (Burr 1995). It is in this fashion that the dominant European society's perspective can define 'the other,' which in this case is non-European society. Dominant 'European' society constructs images of 'otherness' and 'difference.' This involves a set of assumptions about the identity of non-European people. There is an overriding presumption that non-European cultures are broadly sexist, and women are oppressed within them. This



becomes the primary identification of non-European women. They are seen as victims of their own culture.

Foucault talks about 'systems of surveillance' which are sometimes external, and other times become internalized. Ultimately they create a society which conforms to dominant ideals through the practice of discipline. Surveillance is accomplished through the 'gaze.' The term 'gaze' refers to the way in which we become watched or surveyed initially by society and eventually by ourselves. The 'gaze' operates on many different levels and in many different ways. It is not just visual, although the visual is part of it. More broadly, Foucault means it in terms of the ability to see, or to regulate (Gordon 1980). An example of how the 'gaze' operates is the film Mississippi Masala which, as previously mentioned in Chapter One, is the story of a second-generation South Asian woman, Mina, raised in the United States. Even though this film has been produced by a director of Indian origin and is purporting to present Indian society from an Indian perspective, when entered into the hegemonic European culture its meaning is shifted because of the 'gaze.' How the dominant European society views that film is somewhat independent of the intentions of the director. Even though the director might have certain intentions in making the film, how somebody sees it cannot be controlled because of the 'gaze.' The way in which dominant European society sees the film depends on the stereotypes and the assumptions about 'other' cultures existing within it.

In the case of non-European people, part of what happens is that there is a kind of overarching sense of how things are done which reconstructs 'other' people in a way

that fits with the dominant perspective. South Asian women in Britain, for example, are visible only from the Eurocentric 'gaze' through highly criticized practices such as 'arranged marriages,' wearing of the veil, and so on. They are in turn portrayed as passive because their modes of resistance are not understood within the dominant British structures.

In Discipline and Punish (1977), Foucault introduces the idea of a political anatomy of the body. What he refers to by the idea is that the body is always invested in systems of relations of power and domination. This happens through the 'gaze.' Through the 'gaze' the body is turned into an object rather than a subject that acts on its own. It becomes objectified by the 'gaze.' The stereotypical images of non-European people, for example, are their objectified identity. As a result they struggle to internalize the 'gaze,' or to come to terms with the difference between their own identities and the identities that the dominant society constructs for them, or projects on to them.

Foucault also asserts that wherever there is power there is resistance. Often the assumption in our society is that if people are not visibly, politically protesting, they are happy with what is going on. It is often not recognized that compliance and resistance may coexist. People may on the one hand go along with things, and on the other hand may resist them too. Because 'non-white' identity and 'white' identity are constructed in relationship to one another, and because 'white' identity is constructed by being not 'the other,' there is a constant tension around how non-European women construct their identities. Non-European women do not simply absorb 'hegemonic European identity'

rather, they reconstruct their own identities in relation to it. They resist and respond to it in different ways, so they are neither 'white,' nor the stereotypes of themselves. They subvert and reconstruct their own identities in relationship to dominant images.

As Puar's work on Sikh women in Britain shows, because these women are aware of the 'double gaze,' they can fit into the dominant society without necessarily absorbing its values. According to Puar,

The double gaze, a form of oppositionally active whiteness, can facilitate creative subjectivity as well as negotiate objectification, which in turn enable subject positioning by the self. Thus a second-generation Sikh woman simultaneously receives and returns the double gaze; they double gaze as well as are double gazed at. The two processes are interdependent; objectification is a disembodied, visual experience that in specific moments of struggle necessitates an embodied, subjective experience.

How do South Asian women negotiate the constant interplay of subject/object relations? Through oppositionally active whiteness - giving an appearance of conformity while maintaining identity through subversion of dominant white gazes - one can manipulate and empower subjectivity yet retain internal identity (Puar 1995:30-31).

Dominant European society cannot really understand what those who are othered are experiencing because they can only experience things from the position of being 'white.' They cannot recognize the 'double gaze' where someone appears to be participating in dominant society being aware of its expectations, but may be seeing and acting with different eyes. Even though they may appear to be functioning very well, they may still be critical of what is going on around them, and resistant to it, but may not verbalize their feelings. This resistance may be there in terms of what they think, or how they respond, or how they choose to strategically negotiate a situation.

### **1. The Strategy of "Oppositionally Active 'Whiteness'"**

Puar (1995) suggests that the term "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" describes an identity formation that instead of being merely assimilatory is strategically reactive (1995:27). Non-white women can fit into dominant 'white' society without absorbing its values. Such an identity is not a result of racism, or rejection by white society, rather, it is the "product of critical evaluation and appreciation of one's own culture" (Puar 1995:27). Without absorbing the hegemonic European culture these women manage very well, and they appear 'white' in certain ways but in reality what they are doing is constructing another identity that allows them to maintain their South Asian identity. However, they have to navigate between these representations. Through "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" they negotiate the interplay of subject/object relations. They give an appearance of conformity, yet they retain their internal identity by manipulating and empowering subjectivity (Puar 1995:27). It is the way in which people construct this oppositionally active "whiteness" that is one of the main themes I will explore in this thesis.

Other areas where manipulations of the dominant 'white gaze' occur are in terms of appearance and sexual imagery. The image of the stereotype of South Asian woman as exotic is termed "Masala-itis" by Sayantani Das Gupta (quoted in Puar 1995:35). Although such images reproduce the racist ideologies of exoticism "a subversion of such stereotypes means the joke is on the voyeur" (Puar 1995:35). Masala-itis can be used as a navigational tool between identity and subjectivity. Subjectivity is protected through the use of desire. One of the second-generation

British Sikh women Puar interviewed stated that she did not notice any adverse reactions when she wore salwaar kameezes (South Asian baggy trousers and long blouse). The reason was that all her Indian clothes were beautiful, implying that unbeautiful Indian clothes can result in adverse reactions from the dominant society. Thus, through middle-class consumption the stereotype of the 'ugly' South Asian woman changes into the stereotype of the exotic South Asian woman. Masala-itis acts as a strategic way to deal with racism and also challenges the images of assimilation and westernization through "confident, assertive, and sexual self-presentations" (Puar 1995: 37).

### **2.3 SOUTH ASIANS IN THE LITERATURE**

In the last decade there has been a significant amount of literature on the experiences of South Asians in Canada (Wagle 1993; Buchignani 1983; Buchignani and Indra 1985; Gosh 1983; Naidoo 1980d, 1992a; Leonard 1993). This research has primarily focused on the themes of immigration policies, racism, migration, settlement, employment, adaptation and integration, and the roles of women as preservers of ethnic identity. However, some writers have pointed to the limitations of this type of earlier literature in that women are either absent from the discussion, or they are frequently portrayed in the stereotypical traditional female roles of passing on the cultural traditions and values to the next generations (Agnew 1996:101). According to Vijay Agnew (1996), literature on racial groups often presents women in stereotypical traditional roles where they are only looked at as cultural value givers. She discusses a tendency in the literature to study women under headings such as, "Social

Psychological and Individual Level Adaptation,' and 'Family Organization and Family Level Adaptation'" (Agnew 1996:101). This tendency, according to her, leaves out a whole discussion of women as active agents and full participants in the process of immigration and migration, and their struggles for, and contributions towards, the survival of the family. Most literature (see, for example, Buchignani and Indra 1985) discusses process of immigration and migration from male perspectives, or in gender-neutral terms which perpetuate stereotypes of women "as dependents who passively follow male immigrants to Canada and, once there, are confined to the home, family, and ethnic community" (Agnew 1996:101-2).

Parminder Bachu (1993) discusses the assumptions in British feminist literature which treats non-white women as passive victims and looks at their cultures as oppressive. According to her, Asian women are perceived as victims of their cultural values rather than as

active negotiators of the cultural values that they choose to accept, and the lifestyles to which they subscribe, or of their roles as innovators and originators of newer and newer cultural forms, which take from their 'ethnic' traditions and which are continuously reformulated through the filters of their British class and local cultures" (Bachu, 1993:101).

Literature that discusses the history of South Asian immigration has a similar story to tell. This literature has mostly been written by male authors. Women are either absent from the discussion, or, if included, confined to the spheres of community organizations (Agnew 1996:98).

Post colonial literature has also been criticized for not adequately addressing gender issues. There is a body of literature that has argued for the need to incorporate

gender into the analysis of the post-colonial experience. Sara Suleri (1995), for example, argues that one of the problems which post-colonial analysis shares with feminist analysis is the tendency to analyze only one dimension of experience. Both fail to link gender and culture adequately.

Bolaria and Li (1985) point out the limitations of sociological studies on East Indians and immigration policies on their entry into Canada under the traditional "race relation cycle" perspective and its other assimilation theory versions. According to them, studies that stress "adaptation, accumulation, assimilation, and integration" originate from an ethnocentric point of view, and obscure the contributions made by East Indians in the Canadian economy (1985:138). According to them, the assimilationist perspective also draws away attention from the structural conditions that lead to the recruitment of labour power (1985:138).

Miriam Ticktin (1996) discusses contemporary British Asian women's writing and explores the constraints under which British Asian women write. She discusses the problem of publishing as a "fundamental constraint" (1996:68). According to her, if the work does not fit into a certain criteria it is very difficult to find publishers to publish it: "[N]ot even feminist or alternative presses provide obvious vehicles for 'liberation'; they too have ideas about interpreting experience" (Ticktin 1996:68). According to Parminder Bachu, writings by Asian women that fit the models such as stereotypes of "passive/victim," "between and betwixt identity crisis/cultural confrontational desire to return to homeland," and other such stereotypes are easier to get published than writings that do not fit these models (Bachu, quoted in Ticktin 1996:68). Constraints

also exist within these models so that models that are based on "a cultural conflict or identity crisis experienced by the (female) protagonist in the dominant society, and depicts her as alone, fallen between the cracks" are given preference (Ticktin 1996:68).

Anila Srivastava and Michael Ames (1993) have criticized literature by Naidoo, Ghosh and Ralston on the grounds that

much of this research perpetuates many of the theoretical and methodological limitations of conventional social science research by relying on the positivistic, *a priori* categories and concepts defined by a patriarchal, Anglo-American ideology; by failing to adequately express the lived experience of its subjects; by not recognizing a responsibility to enrich, enlighten or enable the lives of women themselves; and finally, by failing to deal squarely with racism and the ideology of multiculturalism in Canada (Srivastava and Ames 1993:123-124).

Srivastava and Ames (1993) point out that these researchers' work is based on the "abstractive ideology of patriarchal sociology" (1993:125). As Dorothy Smith (1974) explains, this approach advocates the pursuit of 'objectivity' by removing the researcher from the "experienced world as a source of reliable information" (Smith, quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993:125). Naidoo, Ghosh, and Ralston's work (observing, describing, and analyzing the data) follows the abstract conceptual model of doing sociology evident in the methods of conventional patriarchal sociology. Objectivity is gained by ignoring how the women themselves see their own experiences and the everyday reality of their lives. Questionnaires, research instruments, and the designs of the studies used by them all act towards removing the respondents from the research, as they are not allowed any "input into the terms, concepts and procedures of the study" (Srivastava and Ames 1993:126). Furthermore, the employment of a large sample size for the purposes of gaining greater credibility for their work, statistical



manipulations and generalizations, and their attempt to detach their own experiences and inside knowledge as members of the South Asian community in order to gain 'objectivity' (in the case of Naidoo and Gosh) are all characteristics of these researchers' work (Srivastava and Ames 1993). An important part of doing research, as pointed out by critical social theorists, is the reciprocity between the researcher and the researched, by which the researcher examines and negotiates his or her relationship to the respondents. This is missing particularly from Naidoo's and Gosh's work, as "they never describe their own backgrounds or experiences or admit their interest in the subject matter" (Srivastava and Ames 1993:125).

Another problem with this scholarship is the use of the ethnic/assimilation model that looks at ethnicity as an individual trait "rooted in 'identity'," and assimilation as an individual psychological process "rooted in changes in 'values'" (Srivastava and Ames 1993:132). When adaptation and integration are described as individual processes, discrimination, conflicts, and difficulties become the fault of the individual involved. Moreover, as pointed out by Bolaria and Li (1985), the assimilation model and its different versions tend to explain ethnic and/or racial inequality in terms of the degree to which the group has assimilated with the new society (Srivastava and Ames 1993:132). From this it follows that the economic success or failure of a group has to do with factors within that particular group, therefore the group has itself to blame for the difficulties it faces (Srivastava and Ames 1993). The assimilation model has yet another fault - its tautological reasoning by which "aspects of assimilation are cited as cause and effect of the same phenomena" (Srivastava and Ames 1993:132). This

cause and effect of the assimilation model becomes evident in, for example, Naidoo's conclusion that "tradition-bound, conservative, isolated individuals [are] more likely to feel disturbed by new experiences in host settings than their more contemporary, liberal, outgoing counterparts," and that "women who tended to respond in socially desirable ways seemed also to experience low levels of stress" (Naidoo, quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993:133).

Throughout their discussion these researchers ignore the consequences of the 'process of assimilation'.

Over time, racial domination is destructive to minority cultures and institutions . . . not only in terms of removing the social incentives and support for minority institutions, but also in fostering an inferiority complex among minority members to the point where they begin to reject their own heritage in pursuit of white culture and symbols that render a higher social recognition (Bolaria and Li, quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993).

Buchignani is another writer whose work contributes to this literature. One weakness in his work, however, is the way in which he seems to valorize ignoring racism. In an essay on "Determinants of Fijian Indian Social Organizations in Canada" Buchignani begins by discussing the Fijian Indians in Canada and ends up making comparisons with Canadian Sikhs. The author seems to praise Fijian Indians for their ability to pick up the "'rules of the game' of Canadian society," for "find[ing] little difficulty in assimilating to most Canadian customary behaviour," for being "not so ethnocentric as to automatically devalue everything Canadian," for "associat[ing] primarily with their Canadian peers," and for being "likely to be fundamentally Canadian in all respects including identity" (Buchignani 1983:74, 81, 85, 86, 87). The author

appears to praise the Fijian Indian pattern of ignoring racism by "over-optimistically assessing their situation and of positively evaluating other Canadians" even when he himself observes that "their perceptions of the levels of discrimination which they experience underestimate reality" (1983:87). On the contrary, he criticizes Canadian Sikhs for not showing the same optimism in ignoring racism, for desiring to retain their ways of life, and for not speaking English well. He depicts Canadian Sikhs as "convinced that Canadians [Euro-Canadians] are extremely hostile to them and that they are the constant targets of racial discrimination," and ends up making the biased judgement that "this is so even though the objective level of discrimination which they face cannot be much different than that faced by Fijian Indians" (1983:87). Throughout the article the author appears to be referring to Euro-Canadian people as Canadians - thus presenting them as the norm - the Euro-Canadian society in Canada as 'Canadian society,' and Euro-Canadian behaviour as "Canadian customary behaviour" (Buchignani 1983:81).

Bolaria and Li (1985) point out many assumptions in the basic premises of the various assimilation theories that treat assimilation and integration "in the long run [as] the most probable and even desirable outcome of racial and ethnic heterogeneity" (Bolaria and Li 1985:12). Rex and Moore point out that terms such as assimilation, integration, and accommodation "assume a 'host-immigrant' framework in which the culture and values of the host society are taken to be non-contradictory and static and in which the immigrant is seen as altering his [or her] own patterns of behaviour until they finally conform to those of the host society. The frame of reference is a cultural

one" (Rex and Moore, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:14). Lyman criticizes assimilation models as ". . . mere projections of the dominant ethos of the larger society, an ethos which has too often been taken over uncritically by the sociologist" (Lyman, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:14).

Bolaria and Li (1985) discuss relations of production as central to the understanding of race relations which according to them, tend to be ignored by sociological studies of racial groups. They criticize the literature on race and ethnic studies for making culture the focus of inquiry, and for concentrating on such narrowly-defined issues as adjustment, adaptation, and assimilation. Such an approach, according to them, limits the study of topics such as the multicultural mosaic of Canada, to things like cultural and linguistic identity. They suggest a reexamination of race relations in Canada by making labour problems the focal point in the understanding of race problems (1985:1).

According to Bolaria and Li (1985), initial contact between two groups determines issues of race and rules of accommodations. This initial contact, according to them, does not just happen by accident. In other words, it is not that two racial groups just happened to meet accidentally and a fight broke out between them over scarce resources. On the contrary, such a contact is usually the outcome of well planned efforts on the part of the dominant group to exploit the labour of a subordinate group. Discussing the term 'racial oppression' they maintain, "Racial oppression presupposes that the dominant group has the power to oppress and the subordinate group has fewer resources to resist oppression" (Bolaria and Li 1985:15). Seen in this

light, terms such as 'minority/majority groups' do not refer to numerical situations, but rather they refer to unequal power in a society (Bolaria and Li 1985:15). Although a product of material conditions, racist ideologies get their support from other social institutions which give the subordinate groups unequal access to rights and privileges on the basis of a socially-defined colour line (1985:17).

Bolaria and Li (1985) point out different dimensions of racial oppression which they maintain range from physical coercion to ideological control. They assert that initially the dominant group employs force to gain authority over the subordinate group. When all the resistance has been broken down, the dominant group then is in a position to employ more civilized means such as the law and ideological domination for the purpose of controlling the subordinate group. Ideological control serves many purposes including providing a justification for the exploitation of "coloured" labour, rationalization of inhuman behaviour and compulsory labour, and as a means of teaching and instructing the subordinate group to be subservient (Bolaria and Li 1985:16). As Cox points out,

The ultimate purpose of all theories of white superiority is not a demonstration that whites are in fact superior to all other human beings but rather to insist that whites must be supreme. It involves primarily a power rather than a social-status relationship (Cox, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:16).

Explaining the relationship between material production and mental production

Marx points out,

[T]he class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of

mental production are subject to it (Marx, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:17).

One aspect of racial oppression which Bolaria and Li refer to as "the psychological and social impact" produces an inferiority complex among members of the subordinate group (1985:17). As a consequence, they begin to reject their own culture and symbols in pursuit of the dominant ones. Cultural symbols thus lost are sometimes revived by the dominant groups "as an entertainment art in the name of preserving the identity of minority groups. Ironically it is often those cultural symbols which appeal to the dominant group that get to be revived by minority members" (Bolaria and Li 1985:18). Low self-esteem and other psychological impacts are the common outcomes of several types of unequal relationships which minority groups often suffer from. The dominant society, however, looks at such behaviour as "culturally peculiar" (Bolaria and Li 1985:18).

Bolaria and Li (1985) point out that racial oppression does not necessarily produce open conflict: "Indeed, in a rigid system of racial stratification, different racial groups may co-exist to reach an apparent level of integration" (1985:18). In fact, as they point out, the absence of open conflict in such systems might even mean the presence of maximal rather than minimal racial oppression. It could also mean that "different units of society are compelled to accept the activities and objectives of the dominant group, and in this sense, different units arrive at a new level of integration which is fundamentally antagonistic (Bolaria and Li 1985:18).

#### **2.4 SOUTH ASIANS IN CANADA: A HISTORY OF RACISM**

Bolaria and Li (1985) examine the "colonial legacy" of racism against East

Indians and the structural conditions which led to the demand for Indian labour (1985:143).

### **1. Conditions for Emigration of Indians**

By the middle of the nineteenth century the British Empire had managed to establish its political and economic control over India, and India became "an economically vassal state" (Sandhu, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:139). The industrial revolution in England created the need to transform India from "an exporter of manufactured goods to that of a supplier of raw materials to the British industrial complex and a market for the consumption of the products of those machines" (Sandhu, quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:139). The British rulers employed various tariffs and legislative means to restrain Indian industrial and commercial enterprises such as shipbuilding which used to be an important industry in India (Bolaria and Li 1985).

The shipbuilding industry was made insignificant by 1840. British policies also brought an end to the domestic handicraft industry depriving craftsmen of their livelihood (Bolaria and Li 1985:139). British rule had far reaching effects on India's agrarian structure. Agriculture, which had been a means of livelihood for farmers, became a commercial enterprise for the moneylenders and landlords (Bolaria and Li 1985:139). Subsistence farmers unable to pay heavy taxes had to borrow money which they were unable to pay back and thus were forced to become tenant farmers or had to give up their lands. Famines in Bengal and Northern India and many other parts of India also added to the problems (Bolaria and Li 1985:139). These were the conditions under which labour was recruited from India and exploited.

Professional recruiters visited Indian villages stricken with crop failures and "entrapped poor Indians by dangling before them hopeful pictures of prospects in colonies. They fulfilled the legal formalities with official connivance of the recruiting depots and then took them over for indentured service" (Bolaria and Li 1985:139-140).

As Bolaria and Li point out, "The emigration of Indians was not entirely voluntary. The recruitment of labour was made possible due to the poverty stricken conditions of India brought about through colonial control" (1985:139). Conditions for these immigrants in the host countries, however, turned out to be equally bad as they retained their colonial status and were made to remain under the political, economic and social control of the core countries (Bolaria and Li 1985:143).

The first South Asian immigrants to Canada were Sikhs who arrived in 1903. They were Sikh troops who had served with the British Army. A few more arrived between 1903 and 1907. These early immigrants were treated with hostility and contempt by the dominant Euro-Canadian society as well as the government in British Columbia. Although the immigration policies of this period allowed Indians to come to Canada without restrictions as British Subjects, they had to face racism in every sphere of their life including meeting basic necessities of life such as renting of housing (Wagle 1993:196; Buchignani and Indra 1985).

This early policy of letting South Asians enter as British subjects was soon reversed by another law, Chapter 33 of the 1908 Immigration Act, by which the entry of 'Hindoos' - as they were consistently referred to in contemporary literature even when 92% of Indian population in Canada during that period was Sikhs - was in effect forbidden (Wagle 1993:196). As Wagle points out, "The actual immigration figures are



worthy of notice. [Forty-five] 'Hindus' landed in Vancouver in 1905; 387 in 1906; 2124 in 1907; and 2,623 in 1908. Only six landed in 1909;10 in 1910;5 in 1911;3 in 1912; and 5 in 1913" (Wagle 1993:196).

This racist policy was protested against by Indians who asserted their right to enter Canada as British subjects. The European colonists, however, wanted South Asians to come only as indentured workers, as it meant "temporary residence of imported non-white workers" and therefore, was preferred by many European colonists in periods of labour shortage (Wagle 1993:197). They were against "free coloured immigration" to Canada and South Asians, as such, were declared "undesirables" (Wagle 1993:197). This led to more racist Canadian immigration policies against South Asians. However, a weak imperial loyalty from India and the image of the British empire as 'colour-blind' prevented the Canadian government from openly legislating against British subjects in India (Walker 1992:5). Consequently, various strategies were used to keep them out. Regulations such as language dictation tests in English, or in other European languages, at the discretion of the immigration officer, and health-screening tests were passed to control their entry (Bolaria and Li 1985:143). They were denied full legal and political citizenship status and therefore, constantly faced the threat of deportation (Bolaria and Li 1985:143). They also had to face a racial labour policy under which they could find employment only in certain sectors. The legislation of 'continuous journey' by which all South Asians wishing to immigrate to Canada were required to come by a continuous journey and the monetary requirement of possessing 200 dollars before landing in Canada were two policies which were designed to put a

halt to South Asian immigration "in fact if not in name" (Wagle 1993:197; Walker 1992:5).

## **2. The Komagata Maru Incident and the Racist Policy of Exclusion of Indian British Subjects from Canada**

In May of 1914 a Japanese steamer with 376 Indian men arrived in Vancouver Harbour. The prevailing attitudes of the Euro-Canadian population as well as the federal government were anti-Asian. As a result, the passengers were refused permission to land, and were quarantined for two months "without food and water rations and a fair judicial process" (Mukherjee 1994:206). After this period the ship was ordered to leave Vancouver harbour by the courts' order and was escorted out by the naval ship *Rainbow* (Bolaria and Li 1985:146). Upon return to India the passengers were arrested and interned in Punjab state and many suffered casualties at British hands in resisting arrest (Bolaria and Li 1985:146). Although the racism of the federal government was not always direct, the extreme effectiveness of the subtle racism is to be found in the policy requirement of 'continuous journey' by which it managed to keep South Asian immigrants out. Although there was no mention of Indians in that Act, it was clear that the Act had been enacted with Indians in mind (Wagle 1993). This measure of 'continuous journey' required that in order to be allowed entry in Canada Asian immigrants were to come directly from their country of origin, on a through ticket purchased at the country of birth, and possessing 200 dollars (Wagle 1993:198). The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which was the only company that provided such travel connection from India to Canada, was issued directives prohibiting it from selling

any "through ticket to Canada" (Law Union of Ontario 1981:26 quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985). Since there was no other company which could provide continuous journey from India to Canada the government of Canada could effectively keep these 'undesirable' immigrants out. In 1910 another clause to exclude Indians was added. This list included "immigrants unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada or of immigration of a special class or occupation or character" (quoted in Wagle 1993:198). Rooted in the racist ideology prevalent in Canada during that period which, among other things, declared South Asians unsuited to the climate of Canada, this clause was justified on humanitarian grounds.

There was yet another justification for excluding immigration from India which was based on a racist theory developed by the Canadian government over the years. This justification was based on the 'assimilation argument' which was used to restrict immigration from India. According to this theory, "it would be difficult for Asian and black immigrants to assimilate Canadian norms; they had a low potential for 'adaptability' to the Canadian climate; and Canada ought to be preserved as a 'white man's country'" (Agnew 1996:28). The absurdity of the "adaptation" and "absorption" argument has been pointed out by the Law Union of Ontario as follows:

The belief that Asians and other non-whites presented problems of "absorption" or that they were "unassimilable" illustrates one of the more obvious absurdities of racist ideology. It was the law itself which ensured that Asians would not be "absorbed" or "assimilated" . . . legislation prohibited Asians from taking many occupations, from voting in elections, from travelling to certain areas of the country, as well as requiring Asians to carry identification cards (quoted in Bolaria and Li 1985:147).

### **3. Immigration of high-cost labour (“brain drain”) from India**

The nineteen sixties and seventies saw the immigration of skilled and professional labour from India which, according to Bolaria and Li, “is part of a general migration of labour from the periphery to the core countries during the post-war industrial boom” and is characterized by the political, economic and cultural hegemony of peripheral by core countries (1985:141). Cultural hegemony by core countries can be seen in the educational system modelled after the developed countries: “Many of these nations have inherited a colonial education system which is being perpetuated in the neo-colonial era” (Bolaria and LI 1985:141). The expansion of the 'higher education system' and the emphasis on 'higher education' as part of the general overall policy of development in underdeveloped countries as well as the grants given by the core countries for the advancement of technology and medical education and for the purchase of research equipment, all work towards the production of an oversupply of university graduates which cannot be absorbed by the labour market of the peripheral countries. This has also been the situation in India and the “Indian labour market has failed to absorb” the oversupply of India’s university graduates (Bolaria and Li 1985:141). The British colonial model of India’s employment structure in which “‘elite feudalism’ maintains the status quo of the established professionals” further limits the future of young professionals (Bolaria and Li 1985:141). These factors have created conditions for the emigration of people from India. The need for a trained labour force for the rapid industrial developments in many western countries led to a change in

immigration regulations that previously restricted the admission of Asian immigrants in many western countries including Canada (Bolaria and Li 1985:141). The importation of "ready-made workers" is economical compared to the production of professionals at home for the host countries (Bolaria and Li 1985:142). However, the selective nature of the process of recruitment of trained labour, the subordinate status of immigrant professionals, and the artificial state licensing requirements all combine to create problems of underemployment for these immigrants (Bolaria and Li 1985:142).

#### **4. Impact of Racist Legislations on Women**

Vijay Agnew (1996) points out that racist legislations that were enacted against people from India had a different impact on women than on men (1996:28). Racist immigration policies before World War I denied entry to the wives and children of men from India and China. Wives from Japan were given only "limited access" (Agnew 1993:219). However, women from the British Isles were always welcome and in the immigration policies they were often named as desirable immigrants (Agnew 1993:219). The policy of 'continuous journey' also had a negative impact on women. Women whose husbands had immigrated to Canada were not able to join them. In 1911-1912, when two South Asian men brought their wives with them after visiting them in India, the women were denied entry. Church groups and the Women's National Council (a women's organization), widely supported the exclusion of South Asian women (Agnew 1993:219). It was only after vigorous protests by South Asian organizations that the deportation order was revoked. Legislation, however, still did not allow South Asian

men to rear families as it prevented their wives the entry (Agnew 1993:219). South Asian men had to struggle against the racist immigration policies for many years before they were allowed to bring their wives to this country. Although the right was granted in 1918 its implementation did not take place until 1924.

As mentioned above, before the First World War women from India were completely denied entry into Canada. After the First World War South Asian women were allowed entry into the country only as dependent spouses even when women in India engaged in paid and unpaid labour. The issue of women's dependent status and its impact on women has also been discussed with regard to non-English speaking women from European countries who immigrated to Canada (see for example, Ng and Ramirez 1981; Ng and Estable 1987; Dunk 1989). Once here, the women had to face all kinds of institutional and every day racism in the form of racist legislation, media representations and other everyday interactions which declared them as outsiders and isolated them from other Canadian nationals. As a consequence, they resisted and responded by strengthening their community ties and by reinforcing the existing cultural ties with South Asian men (Agnew 1996:225).

## **CHAPTER THREE - OPEN ENDED INTERVIEWS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is primarily descriptive in nature. The results of the interviews conducted with 16 South Asian Canadian women will be presented and summarized. The flexibility and contextualness of identity will be elaborated. Detailed statements from the respondents are used to illustrate the different ways that racial minority people construct their own identities when faced with racism, assumptions about their cultures, 'othering,' and stereotyping. Also elaborated is an identity formation which Puar (1995) refers to as "oppositionally active 'whiteness'".

### **3.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY GROUP**

The respondents range from 20 to 53 years of age. Most of the respondents (thirteen people) were born in India. The other areas of origin were: Uganda (one person), Tanzania (one person), and Canada (one person). One of the respondents has no extended family members either in India or in Canada. Two of the respondents have extended family members in India but not in Canada. The rest of the respondents have extended family members in India as well as in Canada. Those respondents that do have extended family members in India and in Canada keep in touch by visiting them, by phone, or through letters.

Originally (born in India or in another country) the respondents come from five different regions in India with the majority coming from Punjab (8 people). The other areas of origin are: Gujarat (6 people), Uttar Pradesh (one person), and Madras (one person). The respondents belong to four different religions with the majority being

Hindu (13 people). The other religions are: Bahai (one person), Muslim (one person), and Sikh (one person).

Eleven respondents came directly to Canada. One was born in Canada but moved to India with her parents right afterwards for three years. She moved back to Canada when she was three. Two of the respondents were in England for three years, then moved back to India for three years before coming to Canada. Another respondent came to Canada after living in Papua New Guinea for a few years and another one came after living in Ireland. Eleven respondents came directly to Thunder Bay after coming to Canada. Of the other respondents, two lived in Hamilton, one lived in London Ontario, one in Winnipeg, and one in The Pas before coming to Thunder Bay. Twelve of the respondents came to meet a family member already living here. The rest did not come to meet anyone.

Respondents came from a variety of working class, middle class, and upper middle class backgrounds. However, the majority of them were from middle and upper middle class family. None of these respondents come from extremely poor class, or lowest caste (such as, street sweepers) status. To identify them individually or more specifically would make it difficult to maintain their anonymity.

### **3.3 ISSUES OF IDENTITY**

#### **1. Flexibility and Fluidity of Identity**

In the first section of the interviews I asked people how they identify themselves in India, in Canada, and within their community. Most of the respondents said they identify themselves differently in different places.



In India we like to say Gujarati but in Canada we say Indian [when with the community] just as an Indian (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

I think it depends on the setting. When I'm at school I refer to myself as an Indian. If I'm with Indian friends I get more specific and say Punjabi. Or, whoever I'm talking to if they are not satisfied with Indian, "where were you born," "what part of India," then I get into Punjabi (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

The same respondent, at another point in the interview, said that she is a Canadian too.

One respondent brings into light the diversity within Indian culture and explains that since she was not exposed to any Indian cultures other than Gujarati she prefers to refer to herself as Canadian first and then Gujarati.

I would consider myself a Canadian. Then after that Gujarati. See, I grew up in a Gujarati community. From that perspective. And it's just recent exposure like in Thunder Bay that I discovered other cultures from India (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

For some respondents religion was an important factor in defining identity differently in different settings. When asked, "How do you refer to yourself?" This respondent's first response was, "I don't know, I guess Indian."

In Tanzania I'll definitely be called Indian. Here in Canada it depends because people usually ask whether you are an Indian from Africa or an Indian from India because there are so many of us in Africa. [In the community] I'm a Bohra. I'm a Muslim and belong to the Bohra community. Dawoode Bohra to be precise (#12, first-generation woman, age 34, arrived at the age of 28).

As the example illustrates, religion can be an important part of defining the identity. However, even within a religious tradition people may identify with a subgroup of that religion.

Some people were uncomfortable with any kind of categorization. For one respondent, for example, even the category South Asian is problematic. This respondent wanted to be identified by religion simply because it separates her from other South Asians and leaves no room for confusion as to who she is.

I just say I'm a Hindu Canadian. That's all. I don't say I'm a Canadian because I'm not a Canadian. I'm Hindu. I'm not Pakistani, I'm Hindu (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

One respondent described herself as East Indian Canadian because she wanted to differentiate herself from Indigenous people of Canada.

Not Indian Canadian. Those are two different things. Only from India. And I'm a Canadian now. So you can say East Indian Canadian (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Many other respondents described themselves as Indian Canadian. There was one respondent, however, who did not like to refer to herself as 'Canadian.'

I say that I'm a Hindu Indian. I have not even taken the Canadian citizenship so I can't call myself Canadian. I am living here for my son and my husband (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

The discussion on how people refer to themselves brings into light the fact that identity is very flexible and fluid. The flexibility and fluidity of identity can be seen reflected in its contextualness and situationality. People's identities can change with the context without them being conscious of it. People do not find it problematic to describe themselves as more than one person in different contexts. On the contrary, they feel very comfortable with the idea that how they refer to themselves actually depends on the setting. In addition, most of my respondents described themselves as having more than one identity. In each case, there were at least two ways that people

identified themselves. They either identified themselves in relation to their province and the country of their birth; or, the province, country of birth as well as the country of home; or, religion and the country of home; or, religion and the country of birth; and lastly, religion and the country of origin.

Flexibility and fluidity of identity was predominant in one particular interview. When I asked the respondent how she refers to herself, initially the respondent sounded like she really knew what she wanted to be identified as. The respondent showed hesitation in referring to herself as anything other than 'Canadian' and said that she prefers to refer to herself as Canadian rather than Punjabi or South Asian. I asked the respondent if she preferred just Canadian or something else with Canadian and she was not able to decide which form of identification she wanted.

Um I prefer Canadian because I was born here. I guess if you are talking about (ethnicity) ethnicity yeah, usually I don't really . . . I guess Punjabi but then you could even . . . that's more specific than South Asian but I prefer Canadian. (Just Canadian or Canadian something?) Oh! I guess you could do that too. South Asian Canadian, or Canadian South Asian, I'm not sure (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

As noted from the above quote, when I asked the respondent if she likes something else with Canadian it seemed she did not want to incorporate her Indian identity with her Canadian identity. Yet, right after that, while discussing her trip to India the respondent made another statement contradicting her first statement:

I have only been to India once and when I was there, it wasn't really that I was Canadian. It didn't seem like I was a Canadian. I just felt . . . there was no cultural shock when I went there. I was expecting it because I have been brought up here more or less. I just felt like home but I feel like I, I am both. Because when I'm here I feel at home and even when I was there I felt comfortable too.

The point that this respondent emphasized the most in different ways, and at different points in her interview, was that because of the skin colour she, as well as her parents, are considered 'immigrants,' or South Asians and not 'Canadians,'

That could be a generational thing too because I think people that are my age they are open to . . . they don't see me . . . I mean they see me as being a different colour, so they know I'm not . . . they don't think I'm Canadian, but after they have spoken to me and they know that I have been brought up here then they see me as a mixture. But when they see other generations or their parents were to see me, a lot of the time their parents will see me as a South Asian person. They won't see me as Canadian. And if I say, "I'm Canadian," "Oh, well, whatever." Likewise if they were to see my parents then because they have accents they don't see them . . . they see them as South Asian (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

As seen from the above quotes the respondent later identified herself as both Indian and Canadian. This shows that it may not be that people want to have a fixed identity, but it is perhaps the responses of Euro-Canadians that put them in that position.

Another respondent when asked how she refers to herself, said that although it depends on the context, and who is asking the question, she considers herself an East Indian of Sikh religion. The respondent said that if somebody asks her what culture she belongs to she will respond by saying 'East Indian.' Yet, at another point in the interview the same respondent said that she considers herself a "unique" individual in society because the way she behaves is not dependent on any culture:

I always consider myself a unique individual in society. Um because I do everything not because there's a culture but what is me. And if it happens to fall along that line it's not because I'm East Indian or because I'm here in Euro-Canadian culture. It's because it's comfortable in my skin. Um so that way I don't feel like, you know, I'm following into their culture and losing mine or I'm totally mine and not, not gaining their's (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

The above quote again points towards flexibility of identity and it shows in this respondent's desire to be free and not be restricted to any one way of life. Flexibility and fluidity of identity was also evident in second-generation respondents' discussions of their childhood and the cultural differences that they were aware of when growing up. The respondents said that the cultural differences always seemed bigger when they were younger and that when they got older the differences no longer seemed to be that way. All of the second-generation respondents gave examples of the things that they could not do but that Euro-Canadian children they knew could do. The respondents said that at the time they did not understand why their parents were not comfortable with those things, but as they grew older they began to understand and appreciate the cultural differences. I asked the respondents how they felt when they were younger and how they feel about it now. All of the respondents said that they now agree with their parents for not letting them do those things.

Now I understand um why they didn't want us to stay out [chuckling] until one or two in the morning. At the time it was just, "my friends are doing it , why can't I?" (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

Flexibility and fluidity of identity is also evident in the following example of one respondent who talked about how exposure to other Indian friends changed her from "all ways to all Indian," and eventually to "a mixture." The respondent explained that when she was younger she was not exposed to Indian culture because all her friends were of European background. As a result, she never felt good about the Indian part of her identity. After growing up when she went to university in another city she was exposed to other people with Indian background and she discovered that she loved

being one of them and began to identify with them. Now, the respondent observes she does not have trouble identifying with either of the groups and feels comfortable with both.

When I was younger it was mostly white friends 'cause of Chatham [where she used to live]. It was so small. I had . . . I think we were the only . . . There were only two Indian families in my whole life of school including myself. But when I moved to university and it was like big and broad and that's when I started to find like, "Oh I love being Indian" you know, because I'm around that and I became proud of you know what I was. Almost it changed from all ways to all Indian because I hadn't had the Indian when I was younger. So it was like a nice change for me though I kept my white friends still. But in university I hung out with mostly Indian [friends] because a lot of my family friends that moved to bigger cities that were in that city um went to that university. So I met back up with them at university. So I knew them already. So then you know we had a nice group with you know the occasional white friends or someone else that kind of loved being around. Like they were open minded enough to be around us. Just as time went on, like you know I had Indian friends but I had white friends too. Like each one is sincere in its own place. So it's like a mixture now. Um but it's like you just seek sincere people as friends rather than . . . because not all my Indian friends when I grew up to university were all sincere. I socialized with them but there were only the few that I kept in touch with now that I'm out of school (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

For this respondent, switching back and forth, identifying with one group and then another is not a problem. Because of the flexibility and fluidity of identity, this process goes on smoothly without any negative consequences.

Flexibility and fluidity of identity was also evident when respondents discussed the topic of raising children. First-generation women were asked, "How are you raising your children -- with South Asian Canadian values or with Euro-Canadian values?" Most of the respondents said that they are raising or have raised their children with South Asian values but are also giving, or have given them, good things from the Euro-Canadian culture. One respondent said that living in a place where majority of the

children are from the Euro-Canadian society it is very difficult to say that she is going to raise her children with South Asian values. The respondent said that it then becomes very important that her child learns the Euro-Canadian society's way of handling things especially when she is facing a situation in which she has to handle something on her own.

Whereas I would help . . . or, for example, if I had, say in Tanzania, had a friend's child come over and I myself am there and they are having a conflict over something, um obviously I would go and . . . I cannot say anything to the other child but I would explain to my daughter and you know, sort out the problem. But here I have noticed that you don't restrain your child. If she thinks . . . okay, I have learnt not to interfere. Let them sort it out. (#12, first-generation woman, age 34, arrived at the age of 28)

Second-generation respondents were asked, "How were you raised – with South Asian Canadian values or with Euro-Canadian values?" These respondents were also asked if they were raised differently from the way daughters are raised in the Euro-Canadian society in Canada or the same.

Most of the second-generation respondents said that they had a strong South Asian value base, but as they were growing up their parents let them also experience aspects of the dominant culture. Respondents explained that in the beginning their parents were scared that if they let the children participate in the culture of the dominant society the children might start thinking that this is the way of life. However, as the parents developed faith in their children and started trusting them more and more they allowed them to experience other things too. Respondents explained that the first few years are very difficult for parents because they see kids in the Euro-Canadian society doing things that they have not seen kids do before in their lives.

One respondent said that it's not that her parents did not trust her, it's just that they did not trust anybody else.

Um I think it was more just because our parents have been brought up with South Asian values, they grew up, they grew up in India so it was a lot different. I'm sure my mother's parents were very strict as well with her, so they have to adjust not only from what they were taught, but from what they see around them and they are scared because it seems like everybody is running lose. They come to Canada, "Oh my Gosh! Look at these kids and they are doing all these things," you know, it's not that they didn't trust us, it's just that they didn't trust anybody else. But as years went on they, I guess, understood that we would be . . . they trusted our choices too (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

My Dad just, like treated us, like as strong people and he made us grow up as being strong people and said because you are a woman you have to be that much stronger. Not because we're women but because society you know looks upon women as being . . . yeah he treated . . . in the traditional sense he raised us like males. Like sons you know [beaming]. That way he really let us experience both and because they had a strong base for us we chose the good values from each hopefully. I mean we are not perfect but hopefully that's what we wanna end up being (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

Respondents said that the way they were raised was different from the way children are raised in Euro-Canadian society in some ways and similar in other ways. Some of the respondents said that although they were brought up learning a lot of the South Asian values, superficially there was not much difference between the way they were brought up and the way daughters in the Euro-Canadian society are brought up. Respondents gave examples of things such as sports, trying out for teams, going for weekends with teams to tournaments and so on that their parents encouraged them to do once they showed an interest.

Like my parents encouraged me to, um once we showed interest in sports



athletics, they encouraged us to go out and try out for the teams and go for weekends with teams to tournaments. Like exactly the same way . . . the things they [Euro-Canadians] do superficially (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

One respondent gave a slightly different view of how she was brought up as a daughter and said that in her family school came first:

In my family our school came first and then any extra-curricular activity. I wasn't allowed to do any sports, I wasn't allowed to do any . . . (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

Respondents said that if their parents did not want them to do something they always gave an explanation why they did not want them to do that. Most of the second-generation respondents said that they feel like they got their Indian culture and also did not miss out on anything in the dominant European Canadian culture. Respondents said that the things they missed out on were very minute and they do not consider them important now.

In some instances, the second-generation women's discussions about how they were raised showed a sense of ambivalence which also points towards flexibility of identity. In one of the interviews, it seemed like the respondent was doing two things. On the one hand, she was trying to make me understand what she was saying, and on the other hand, she was also trying to make herself understand it. It seemed like this respondent was talking to me and at the same time sorting things out in her own mind which in a way is also an effort at deconstructing stereotypes. South Asian Canadian culture is stereotyped as conservative. Growing up in the dominant European derived culture in Canada second-generation Indo-Canadians are aware of those stereotypes.

In some instances, as will be discussed later on, they end up absorbing those stereotypes and in other instances, as can be noted here, they have not only absorbed them but they also show the ability to see through them.

I think we were brought up with more um not . . . I wouldn't say with conservative values, because conservative means uptight and it's not usually . . . It doesn't mean it's uptight because we have . . . like our parents don't want us out all night and I'm not saying all Euro-Canadians do that. But they're more lenient. It's more acceptable. Um it was just . . . it was not like an uptight thing. You can have fun and come home (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

In conclusion, the interviews demonstrated the flexible and fluid nature of identity. The themes discussed in the interviews illustrated that the way people identify themselves not only depends on the context, but can also incorporate more than one identity. In some instances, people show an inability to identify themselves in a particular way unless a context for that identification is provided. In other instances people showed a connection to more than one identity without even being aware of it. The flexibility and fluidity of identity was also evident in the discussions of the different ways respondents were raised and are raising their own children.

### **3.4 EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, OTHERING, AND STEREOTYPING**

All of the respondents showed an awareness of racism, othering, and stereotyping in their lives. While most of the respondents openly discussed these issues, there were a few respondents who showed some reluctance to talk about it. Most of the respondents said that they had experienced these in a variety of ways through issues involving clothes, challenges about Indian marriages, stereotypes of 'arranged marriages' and other aspects of their culture, and general comments of Euro-

Canadians about Indo-Canadians. Particular instances of racism, stereotyping, and othering were cited in the form of the dominant society's views about Indian clothing, comments about 'arranged marriages,' comments about religious practices, assumptions about intolerance to the cold weather, efforts to deny them the experience of being Canadian, and devaluing degrees obtained in their country of birth. Second-generation respondents, in particular, said that their culture is "not being accepted for what it means [to them]."

Most of the respondents said that people stare at them and look at them 'differently' when they wear Indian clothes. Others said that even though they never had an actual experience of people looking at them differently, they felt reluctant to wear Indian clothes because they were aware of a history of Euro-Canadian people looking at Indian clothes in a 'different' way. Some of the second-generation women reflected on their public school days and were amused by the fact that children who made fun of them, or their culture "actually turned around and thought it was really cool" when they were older. Comments like, "Oh that's so cool! Did you get that from India?" "Oh my God it's so neat!" were given as examples of 'exoticizing' the culture. Respondents referred to it as a "band wagon thing" because of the fact that "whatever is cool for that short amount of time then that's what they are going to think is cool. If it is uncool then they are going to think that is old, that is so uncool" (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada). Himani Bannerji (1993) maintains that how people are viewed is dependent on how closely they resemble the dominant society. Dominant is held as the norm against which people's 'Canadianness' is

weighed. There is a certain unspoken criteria of how a 'Canadian' should look.

Anyone who does not fit that norm is not considered a Canadian (Bannerji 1993).

All of the respondents said that the reason they do not wear Indian clothes when they go about in the dominant society is the dominant society's reactions.

Respondents said that it makes them uncomfortable when people stare at them. Some of the respondents said that on the one hand Euro-Canadians like Indian clothes but on the other hand they also criticize Indo-Canadians for wearing Indian clothes. The respondents attributed the reason to narrow-mindedness on the part of majority Euro-Canadian people.

People stare at you and also being in Thunder Bay a lot of people are narrow minded. Although they like your clothes whatever, they are narrow minded. They say like, "You are here, you are Canadian, you should be dressing like Canadians. You should be talking like Canadians" (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

At another point in the interview the same respondent said:

I guess I used to get angry when somebody would say that I'm Canadian, I should be wearing Canadian clothes but now because I'm working and so I tend to not worry about it. I just . . . I am here, I do my job and get out (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

In making such comments members of the dominant society are narrowly defining 'Canadian' as what is European derived. The implicit assumption in such statements is that 'Canadian' does not have its own ethnic and racial connotations. The dominant society assumes the right to retain its culture or let it evolve even after leaving Europe behind, but it denies that same right to 'other' people. The above quote also points towards "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" which can be seen in this

respondent's statement, ". . . because I'm working and so I tend to not worry about it. I just . . . I am here, I do my job and get out." The respondent's wearing of dominant cultural clothing, which might be taken as an act of conformity by the dominant society, is actually a strategy that helps her to function in the politics of her everyday life.

Some of the first-generation respondents expressed their anger at the way members of the Euro-Canadian society describe their clothing. One respondent said that Euro-Canadian people look down upon Indian clothing and describe it as "funny."

They look at our clothes and say that it is "funny," whereas, we see people here half naked but we never say that this woman is half naked or this man is half naked (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45)).

As the above example illustrates, majority society's cultural practices can also seem strange or unusual to the minority people. However, the society that holds power automatically feels the right to express its impressions of the cultural practices of the 'other' society. Unlike Euro-Canadian people, my respondents felt unable to publicly express their views about certain cultural practices of the majority society. The Euro-Canadian society, on the other hand, has always been in the position to view everything non-European critically, and to define it the way it wants.

Most of the second-generation women said that the reason they do not wear Indian clothing outside is because they do not want to be looked at 'differently.' Second-generation respondents said that if everybody else wore Indian clothes they would probably wear them too. One second-generation woman said that she has a complex about wearing Indian clothes in the dominant culture especially in Thunder Bay and made reference to a history of racism that, according to her, has existed in this

city.

Yeah, I feel uncomfortable especially here in Thunder Bay wearing Indian clothes when I know . . . when I have a feeling its not being accepted for what it means to me. Being interpreted different (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

I asked this respondent if she feels that people look at her in a 'different' way when she wears Indian clothes. The respondent replied that she feels that they do because of a history of people looking at Indian clothes in a 'different' way.

I feel like it, even if they don't look at it in a different way, I just feel uncomfortable because there is a lot of history of people [Euro-Canadians] looking at it in a different way. (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

Difference can be seen in the perceptions of recent migrants compared to people who have been here for many years. People who have recently immigrated to Canada have a relatively positive experience as far as the wearing of Indian clothing is concerned. One respondent who recently immigrated to Canada said that Euro-Canadian people find Indian clothing very beautiful and that the only reason she did not wear Indian clothes outside was because she did not want to look different.

They like . . . they feel that it is more fashionable, that it is more colourful (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

I asked the respondent if she could give an example of some incident that made her feel like that.

Well, my neighbour was telling me, "Your clothes are really fashionable compared to our clothes. That's for sure." And one of the bankers when I went to the bank she said, "Oh, you're wearing spring clothes all the time. That's good, like you feel like spring all year." I said, "yes" and one of my friends was telling me that "it's not a big difference. You are wearing just a big frock and the pants, nothing else. But your dresses are more comfortable and colourful" (#9,

first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

The Indian system of marriage as opposed to the European system of marriage is another major area where negative stereotypes and prejudice are reportedly common. One of the topics discussed in the interviews was images of Indian marriages held by Euro-Canadian people. Most of the respondents thought that the images of Indian marriages are based on Euro-Canadian society's own assumptions and are not even close to what the system actually is. Respondents said that these images are incorrect and distorted.

It drives me crazy. Sometimes it makes me laugh that people have such a misconstrued view about it. It's looked down upon (#4, second generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

I think there's a lot of misconception. People think that two individuals are just thrown together and they have nothing to say about it (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

They think that people are crazy – how can two people get married when they don't know . . . It's not like that at all. Not in my family anyway (#15, first-generation woman, age 22, arrived at the age of 16).

When asked "Has anybody asked you if you 'arranged' your marriage?" in the case of married women and "Has anybody asked you if you are going to 'arrange' your marriage?" in the case of unmarried women, 15 of the 16 respondents said that they have had those questions from close friends, from elderly people, and sometimes from strangers they are meeting for the first time.

Well, there's a lot of explaining usually that goes around. Any discussion about arranged marriages and it's come up many times with friends, with co-workers, even with a lot of older people that I don't know that well. I'm just meeting people then and usually they see me as a South Asian woman and they say, "Oh, what about those arranged marriages?," "Are you having one?" That's

usually the question that follows after we talk about that (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

That's the impression they have. I have seen 90% of them asking me about the same question (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

All of the second-generation respondents and most of the first-generation respondents expressed sadness at the fact that the dominant society does not understand that there are so many variations in marriage practices. Respondents also felt that if somebody brings up the topic they are not asking because they want to know more about it, but they already think that they know about it. When talking about Indian marriages some of the second-generation respondents expressed their disagreement with the commonly used term 'arranged marriage' itself and referred to it as "the term from way back then [colonial era] that has still lingered on." One second-generation respondent said that when people ask her about 'arranged marriages' she finds herself defending herself, and another second-generation respondent said that even when she is not being defensive people assume that she is being defensive. Both of the respondents said that they find it very difficult to face questions about 'arranged marriages' because of the preconceived ideas.

It's not viewed as a, what's the word I'm looking for . . . you feel that if somebody brings it up, they already have a . . . they are not asking because they want to know more about it, they already think they know about it. And no matter what you say they are assuming you are being defensive even when you are not. So it's really taxing (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

But then I find myself . . . it's almost . . . I'm not offended but I kind of feel a little bit different like awkward when that question comes up. I just feel a little bit awkward almost because I feel like I have to defend myself - "No I am not I am not going to get an arranged marriage (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).



One of the first-generation respondents challenged that and said that she does not think that Euro-Canadians assume anything, but they are just curious and that they agree with this system.

No, I have talked to quite a few Canadian [Euro Canadian] friends and they say in a way it is good because there is no pressure for you to choose a boy. Sometimes parents choose the right boy and the right family for you and you meet that person, go out with that person, and if you think that guy is the right person for you, you marry that person. So there is no pressure on the girl. So they think that's a good thing about arranged marriages; at least your parents help you to choose the right boy (#1, first generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

All of the second-generation respondents and most of the first-generation respondents discussed their own feelings about 'arranged marriages' and how they feel about the stereotypes of 'arranged marriages.' Respondents said that they are bothered by the fact that marriage failures in the dominant Euro-Canadian society and "abusive dominant culture marriages" (#4, second-generation woman) are not stereotyped in the same ways as Indo-Canadian ones are.

Another thing that bothers me is that you don't hear Euro-Canadians saying, "Oh this person's been dating this person for 8 years and um they got in a bad marriage and now they're divorced but it's because they saw each other for 8 years. Like timing is not of essence because if the two people that are right for each other . . . because people who've been dating 8, 9 years still get divorced. So what would you say that knowing each other longer makes it better? (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

I have also seen abusive dominant culture marriages, their relationships, and their stereotype is not as apparent (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

Some of the respondents discussed how the dominant society comes to focus on

certain aspects of the Indian culture. One respondent said that the dominant society takes certain aspects of the culture and "starts assuming it's own thing" (#13, second-generation woman) about Indo-Canadians. The respondents said that there is a tendency on the part of the dominant society to listen to those voices that are rebelling against their own culture, whereas the voices of "the whole class of them" (#13, second-generation woman) who have no problems with their culture are not given any importance. Most of the respondents said that any mention of the Indian culture is bound to come to back to the Indian system of marriage and assumptions are made on basis of the comments of one or two people out of the whole class of them.

Another area where racism and stereotyping were experienced was the education system and the ignorance of educators within that system. Some of the second-generation respondents gave examples of their experiences with educators who they said have a lot of assumptions and do not really hear different voices. Respondents said that a lot of educators in their experience have not taken the time out to ask them what their family life was like, or how they view things.

Religion was also discussed as an area where racism and stereotyping was experienced. Most of the first-generation and the second-generation respondents discussed the stereotypical images of their religions. Respondents, belonging to the Hindu religion, gave examples of people questioning whether they worship "a million gods." Some of the second-generation respondents talked about their experiences in Catholic schools where the teachers instead of respecting their religious values tried to scare them into accepting the Catholic religion:

Um my teacher told me in not so many words that I would probably go to hell if I didn't become a Catholic because I was Hindu. But she didn't say it in that way, she said, "Well, you don't want to go to hell, do you?" (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

When asked, "How do you think Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians?" the discussion led to a number of wide ranging topics. Issues such as media portrayals of India and Indian culture, experiences of racism and 'othering' at the work place, the right to be regarded as Canadians, structural racism in Canadian universities and many more similar issues were discussed. A predominant perception was that South Asian Canadians are not seen as Canadians. Most of the respondents said that Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians as 'immigrants' and not as Canadians.

I think a lot of the time they are not viewed as Canadians. I think they are seen as a minority. They are seen as immigrants (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

Every time I go to work whatever they still see me as Indian. They don't see me as Canadian or one of them. Like you know I've been living here in Canada they don't see me as a Canadian (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

Some of the respondents discussed their experiences with racism at their work places. Respondents felt that their views are not valued at their work place. Respondents gave examples of incidents where their judgement was questioned. One first-generation woman said that Euro-Canadians think that they are superior to South Asian Canadians and perceive them as nothing compared to them:

They think us to be lower than them. They think that way. We are not. We are not. If you see, you see, our Indian people are more qualified. Most of the people have some kind of degree, education, proper, you know, knowledge

before they start to go to work. But here they don't. But they act like as if they are superior to us (#10, first-generation woman, age 49, arrived at the age of 30).

This respondent gave several examples of incidents that made her feel like this:

I was working one time. In the communication book it said that I had to book an appointment for a patient. I got the appointment. Then another staff came to work on her shift and she said, "You shouldn't have phoned this doctor. You should have phoned the other doctor. You should know this and that." I said, "Whatever message there was in the communication book I did that way. They say phone doctor so and so and take an appointment I did the same way. You don't have to be angry with me. That's what it says there and that's what I did" (#10, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 30).

Another respondent experienced racism differently:

At work especially you know they look at you differently. Like you know as if they don't want to touch you even. Like there's a customer who comes in he doesn't want like you know the skin. He doesn't want to be touched. I'm going, it should not be like that. I'm a human being. I shouldn't be treated like this. It's racism. They see the colour. That's about it. That's all they see. Even he would put the change there on the counter (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

As seen from the above example, interviewees reported frequent challenges and racism at work and they report it to be because they are a minority and of a different skin colour. The first example also brings to light the positive self-perception of many South Asian Canadians. They have a high sense of self-esteem and consider themselves equally or even more competent compared to some of their Euro-Canadian colleagues.

Respondents also discussed the existence of racism in its subtle and hidden forms. One respondent said that there is a lot of hidden racism in Canada and that only very mature (older) people show it, or openly talk about it. This respondent also

talked about the structural racism that exists in Canadian universities.

For instance, the university, you know, you have a degree from India. They [Indo-Canadians] have to go through them accepting your degree and evaluating it and sometimes even not giving you admission. So it's very very distressing. That shows how much value they place on Indian degrees (#7, first-generation woman, age 32, arrived at the age of 25).

The same respondent said that the reason for this kind of treatment of people of South Asian origin is because they are humble.

I think because South Asians are humble. We don't . . . "Oh, it's okay" and just take it. If we explain things and make it clear that we have certain standards too. We even exceed some of the standards. It's ignorance. There needs to be more education in society about different cultures (#7, first-generation woman, age 32, arrived at the age of 25).

The above example points to the presence of structural racism in Canada in the sense that people have to prove the equivalency of the degrees and credits obtained in their country of birth. The methods by which their university degrees and credits are assessed are very much produced by the dominant culture and people within the educational system are not well placed to be able to assess those things within a cultural context other than the dominant one.

Second-generation respondents also discussed media representations of South Asian Canadian women as exotic and said that these women's experiences are always presented in extremes either as 'exotic' or as 'oppressed.' Respondents said that their experiences are never presented as normal. The respondents said that the reason for such representations is the dominant definition of 'normal.' Since the dominant culture is regarded as 'normal' anything that deviates from it is regarded as 'not normal.'

Some of the second-generation respondents discussed their childhood

experiences of racism, othering, and stereotyping and the impact these experiences have had on their lives. One respondent talked about her public school days and explained how ignorance about racial minority cultures can affect a child's self-esteem and also perpetuate the phenomenon of 'othering.'

1979 was the international year of the child and multicultural education was all over the place. I don't think anybody knew what it meant. But at the time it was becoming the big buzz word. So I remember sitting in my class and the teacher showed a film on India. And the whole time I was watching the film, I was just sinking into my chair, hoping I would disappear. I was really embarrassed and was really scared what all these kids were going to think. It was a film about a South Indian family. There were not that many similarities. There were some similarities. But you know the culture is so diverse. So I couldn't relate to a lot of the things that were going on. But when the film was over, the teacher said to the class, this is what my family is like. And I couldn't say anything because it really wasn't what my family was like. And even if it was a Punjabi family (you could relate) yeah. So in this case misrepresentation was a lot worse than no representation. At least when there wasn't any film, I could defend myself against myself. But now I had to defend myself [against] the class thinking that I am the way that I'm not. And I really didn't have a voice to say. So my voice was silenced (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

The above example is quite powerful in expressing issues of voice, authority, position of power, and the 'gaze.' It points out that even when the majority society makes an effort to be broad minded by trying to understand 'other' cultures it may still end up looking at those cultures from the standpoint of it's own assumptions. This was an effort, supposedly, to do something culturally sensitive in a classroom, yet it was done poorly and had the opposite effect. As the respondent comments, prior to the showing of the film there may have been all kinds of stereotypes about her culture but she was the authority on them and could agree or disagree. To have it presented to the class in a visually powerful manner that suggests it to be typical, and secondly, to

have the teacher who is another voice of authority say "this is what so and so's family is like" removed the authority from her. This particular anecdote shows how a dominant voice can take away the voice of a minority person or can silence it. It also shows how the authoritative voice of someone in power such as a teacher can have a negative impact on a child's life. Because the teacher is in a position of power, when he or she says that this is how something 'is' the children are going to believe that simply because they are supposed to believe that. This is also a good example of the 'gaze.' Even though the film might have been made to present a different cultural lifestyle in a culturally-sensitive manner, assumptions of dominant society simply reinforced the stereotyping and the racism that this particular child experienced. In other words, even though the film director might have had very different intentions in mind, because of the dominant 'gaze' it was interpreted in a certain fashion by the teacher and other students who were members of the dominant culture.

While most of the second-generation respondents discussed the media representations of Asian women as exotic to be problematic, most of the first-generation respondents showed resentment of the media portrayals of India as a 'poor country'<sup>1</sup>. First-generation women discussed images of poverty that are shown by the media and its impact on the dominant society in terms of its perceptions about Indo-

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<sup>1</sup>. This is an area in which the class, or caste background of the participants maybe reflected in terms of issues that are of concern to them. As previously noted, none of my informants are from lowest class or caste backgrounds in India. However, the issue that they are collectively raising here and are concerned with in terms of their perceptions is the overwhelming negative imagery of India which they see represented in dominant media.

Canadians. One respondent said that there is so much worth seeing in India and even one-tenth of that does not exist here. However, all that is shown about India is "filth," whereas the bad part of western countries is rarely shown. Respondents said that in the media they mostly see cities like Calcutta and Bombay which further reinforces the image of India as 'poor,' 'crowded,' and 'dirty.' One respondent compared begging to the Euro-Canadian practice of 'busking.' To her this is not any different from begging. To this respondent poverty and begging are not exclusive to the eastern countries but also exist in the western countries as well.

They think that India is a very poor country. Like as if it is a country of beggars. On T.V. too they always show the bad part of India. That there is poverty, and that there are people who don't have any clothes, or homes. So they are sleeping outside on roads. That's all they show. But they never show the good part. So in these people's minds it has sunk in that India and all Asian countries are poor. I have seen these [Euro-Canadian] people here begging for money. Especially in summers. Downtown and everywhere. Their method of begging could be different. They play some instrument. Yesterday we went downtown. Three people were standing there playing guitar and the box of the guitar was open and everybody was putting money in it. Even here people go and eat in the shelter house. So even here there are beggars but these people don't show that on T.V. etc (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

As can be seen from the above example, this respondent sees negative stereotyping in the way the media portrays eastern countries. These images can have a negative impact on the lives of minority people in Canada. As a result of these images, minority people are looked down upon and many times have to defend themselves and their cultures. They get drawn into arguments that they have no intentions of participating in. One respondent gave an example of an incident that took place in her work place when someone came there after watching a television show on



India. This respondent said that she comes across many Euro-Canadians like this during the course of her daily business.

Few times on T.V. they showed some really bad things about India. My neighbour came and started telling me that in your India this happens, in India that happens, or, in your India there is nothing to eat. So things like that. I told him that he was wrong. I told him, "You cannot compare India to any other place. The amount of money that India has, or Indian people have . . . that same India that you are showing on T.V. as poor, go there and see how much they have." I said to him, "your life and Indian people's lives are two different things. You people show off and finish whatever you get without any concern about tomorrow and where you will eat. And what will you do? You will go and knock at the door of the government. But in India even a beggar, if he gets 5 pennies he will save two pennies out of that so he can at least get something to eat if he doesn't get any alms. You cannot compete with Indians." (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Another respondent discussed the process of obtaining Canadian citizenship as discriminatory. The respondent pointed out the weaknesses of this process in that it discriminates against people who are not born in Canada. It requires people who are immigrating to this country to have knowledge about Canada which she believes even people who are born in Canada do not possess. The respondent points out that the system is discriminatory because the same requirements are not made of Canadian-born people.

I became a Canadian. I treasure my Canadian citizenship but that doesn't make me forget who I am, what my background is. And I believe that every person who is 18 or older or graduating from high school, they should take an oath to what it means to be a Canadian. Um I don't think they even know what it means to be a Canadian like you know, and then we are given this booklet to read and "there go memorize these questions and you have to answer these questions." But that doesn't make you . . . just because you can answer certain questions that doesn't make you who you are inside. Like I am just as much a Canadian as I am an Indian. But I value my Indian citizenship as well. Like although I don't have it any more but I value who I was and who I still am. And that's what they have to do with the Canadian [Canadian born] kids. They have to make them

realize who they are and what benefits they have. And . . . 'cause a lot of people grow up without them. They can't name 10 provinces and they expect us to name them. Like I was interviewing some girls here and she goes what is eastern standard time and I'm like "How long have you lived here?" She's like 18 years old. And I'm like they expect us to know these things when we are not even . . . we didn't grow up with our hours changing and all that stuff, it's just part of life here and they expect us to know these things. So those are the things they have to change in their society. Take out the stereotypical strata existing from their standpoint of . . . 'cause they are giving us a bad rap and then in turn we rebel against them and we do the same things to them. We say, "Well, this is what's bad about your culture." Instead of maybe you are coming to a some sort of compromise on both (#13, second-generation woman, arrived at the age of 13).

As seen from the above, this respondent sees discrimination in the Canadian process of obtaining citizenship. The respondent finds it discriminatory that people who are immigrating to Canada are expected to know facts about Canadian society, in order to obtain citizenship, that most Canadian-born people have little or no knowledge of. However, because they are born in Canada they are not necessarily required to gain knowledge of those facts. This respondent's statement is also a good example of "oppositionally active 'whiteness.'" As she notes, "I treasure my Canadian citizenship but that does not make me forget who I am, what my background is." This shows her resistance to the assimilationist identity and her response to the assumption that to be a Canadian one has to give up one's own cultural identity and adopt the dominant one.

Many of the respondents said that Euro-Canadians have positive perceptions of Indo-Canadians. Respondents said that it might be different in bigger cities such as Toronto, or Vancouver, but in Thunder Bay what they have come across is that Euro-Canadians respect Indo-Canadians. One respondent thinks that Indo-Canadians are perceived in a good way because they are highly educated and because they do not

have problems with the language. Another person said that Euro-Canadians think that Indian culture is rich, and many are trying to follow Indian ways. Some of the other positive perceptions noted were Euro-Canadians' perceptions of Indo-Canadians as family oriented, friendly, and very good natured, smart with regard to education, respectful towards their elderly, respectful towards their guests, very hospitable, and possessing a very good and rich culture.

One second-generation woman thinks that Euro-Canadians perceive Indo-Canadians as very respectful towards the elderly and gave the example of an incident that made her think like that. Throughout the interview the respondent really stressed this point about her culture. This example shows that positive perceptions about one's own culture held by the dominant society can strengthen one's faith in one's own culture. While the respondent did not indicate this, her own perceptions may have been affected by the dominant society's good view about her culture's respect for the elderly.

Um and I remember my . . . I had um when I took a university dance course, it was a Canadian dance course, modern dance and the teacher was a Euro-Canadian and she goes, "One thing that I love about India," and I was so happy to hear you know, she was very into yoga and stuff like that, "One thing I love about India, Indian people and I'll feel that warmth connection with that because they have a lot of respect for older people or you know, their parents," this and that. I'm a little biased saying that and I don't know you know, but hearing it from some one who is Euro-Canadian made me realize that that's how some people perceive that aspect of us you know (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

To sum up, most of the respondents said that they had experienced racism, othering, and stereotyping in a variety of ways in areas such as responses to clothing,

assumptions about Indian marriages, the Canadian education system, religion, Euro-Canadian society's perceptions of Indo-Canadians, and media portrayals of Indian cultures. Respondents discussed instances of media portrayals of India as 'poor,' stereotypes of Indian marriages, and the majority Euro-Canadian society's perceptions of Indo-Canadian people as 'immigrants' and not as 'Canadians.'

### **3.5 IMPACT OF RACISM, OTHERING, AND STEREOTYPING**

The interviews point to far reaching consequences of racism, othering, and stereotyping. Constant exposure to racism results in the internalization of racism, absorption of stereotypes, and the use of racism as a way of dealing with racism. Some of the respondents talked about how racism had an impact on them when they were growing up, and also how other non-European children responded to the racism that they had to face from Euro-Canadian children. Respondents talked about their public school days and said that when they were growing up teachers did not know how to deal with racism because it was not labelled as racism in those days. One respondent talked about how she internalized the racism that had existed in her home town. When she moved to Thunder Bay with her family it still had an impact on her.

Teachers didn't know how to deal with racism. They didn't know, I feel that they did not treat the situation well. I remember, I had these little choker pendants from India, they were really valuable to me. Relatives had brought them from India and they were really really valuable. I used to keep them in this purse of mine but the purse didn't cross properly. Things used to fall out of it and I remember, this was in Thunder Bay, this was after all the racism that existed in Hamilton was now internalized. So even when people were not being racist I just thought they probably would be. So I remember I was on the bus coming home from school and my purse dropped and these little Indian pendants dropped and this little boy, at the time he was not so little, but now [chuckling]. . . so this little boy picked them up and gave them to me and said, "Here, you

dropped something out of your purse," and I said, "No, it's not mine." And he said, "Yeah, it fell out of your purse" and I was so embarrassed. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. So I left those pendants on the bus and I was really really embarrassed and I came home and I kicked myself for being embarrassed, for not being able to admit to him that those were mine, because he accepted that, he didn't really make faces, he didn't laugh at me, he didn't put me down. But I guess I was expecting that (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

As seen from the above example, the effects of racism are not short-term. This shows in the above respondent's statement, "So even when people were not being racist I just thought they probably would be." Thus, when second-generation Indo-Canadians want no part of their own culture it is not necessarily their own desire but their exposure to racism and fear of future racism that makes them choose between their own culture and the dominant one. The same respondent illustrates these ideas when she talks about her childhood:

When we first moved to Hamilton from India, it was really really bad. It was 1978 and racism was all over the places especially in Hamilton. Then I felt really uncomfortable about being Indian, about wearing different clothes, about speaking a different language. I came to Canada speaking English with an Indian accent, but, I spoke English, I told you we were in England for a while, so I knew English well. And that was regarded as a language deficit. So I was sent to speech therapy, but, anyway, the point is that everything that had to do with the culture I shunned. I didn't want anything to do with it, simply because it was not accepted. But I don't think it was just a matter of being accepted, I think it was demeaned, you know what I mean?

The above quote also reflects "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" which can be seen in this respondent's resistance to identify with her culture because of the racism prevalent in society.

The respondent also talked about other racial minority children and their strategies of dealing with the racism. She gave an example of a racial minority child

who she said "used to be called the N word" and the strategy that he had to come up with to deal with the situation.

There were lots of stories of children calling me names, Paki was the big thing. Children from all different cultures would use that term. And I didn't understand that. I knew that the dominant kids, I could almost understand that they would, but I did not understand why the other kids from the other cultures would do it (even when they were experiencing the same thing) exactly. And then there was this kid Anthony that lived near where I lived. He was in the same school that I was. He was West Indian and he used to be called the N word. He used to be called that all the time, but whenever we were at school, and I knew he was hurt by that, whenever we were in the school yard, he would start calling me Paki first, you know, so but then after about five minutes everybody would be after me and they would forget about him. I guess that's why he did it. Any way, the teachers didn't really respond well at the time, I guess they didn't really know what to say, how to deal with it. They would just sort of say, "Stop." But the people who were being the bullies didn't know what to stop. It wasn't really named, it wasn't really labelled as racism.

As mentioned before, another impact of racism is that children who suffer from racism try often to deal with it by directing it toward other minority children who they know are also suffering from the same racism. The example shows that those children who have to face racism in their daily lives have to come up with strategic ways of dealing with that racism. In the above example, the child Anthony had to somehow protect himself and the only option that he felt available to him was to come up with something that would draw the other children's attention away from himself and to another minority child. Even though it meant that another child now had to go through the same suffering as he himself had to, he found out that it 'worked' every time.

Another respondent discussed the impact of assumptions about her culture:

Like when people start assuming things about our culture, they just take certain aspects of our culture, like you know, when kids are rebelling or maybe they don't like arranged marriages or . . . as the Canadian culture [Euro-Canadian

culture] puts it, you know, if they don't like certain things about their culture, they [Euro-Canadians] say, "oh my God! their culture is all bad and this is why their kids are doing it." It could be just one or two kids out of the hundreds and it makes all of the hundred kids look as if they are all rebelling against their culture and they are not looking at their culture as being anything good. And people start assuming just from those negative two kids out of the whole. They start saying, "Well, this is what it is and this is why the kids are being oppressed and this is what should be done to change it," and "They are Canadians, their parents should be Canadian" and you know, "They should change their attitudes. They are not living in India any more so why are they forcing their kids to do certain things?" But parents are not forcing their kids. Parents are just saying this is how things are, this is what we do in our culture. We would like you to do it. If you don't like to do it let us know. Then we can make something . . . But if the kid just say slams the door and walks out of the house, and says, "No! this is how I don't want to do it," . . . Like there's one example. There's a lady in our community. Her son is of the marrying age. He recently went to India and she went with him and their other daughter started saying things like, "My Mom's gone to India, I don't know what she's doing there, he's not going to get married anyways" and she's saying those things in a bar. Like where a lot of people can hear and that puts negative thoughts into people's heads. So those are where the assumptions come from and that's just one person out of the whole class of us and it's starting to make all of us look bad and like you know, when people ask us, "So how do you feel about arranged marriages? Oh, I know of a person who feels this way, do you feel that way too?" "Why are your parents arranging your marriage, can't you find one on your own?" Those are the assumptions that come and they make us look bad and we are not deprived kids. Like you know, our parents give us everything. We have probably have more things than any Canadian person gets them together you know. Um like we have so much family support, so much of everything and people here just assume their own things about us (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

The above quote captures this respondent's sense of anxiety sitting in the bar, and her recognition that because there are many negative assumptions about her culture, anything which is said in this context is going to take on meanings well beyond what the speakers intend.

To sum up, the main issue discussed in this section was how racism, affects people's lives. Three different impacts of racism were pointed out by respondents. The

first one was described by the respondent herself as "internalization of racism." In this instance racism makes people internalize the racism so that they start thinking and feeling the same way as the racist society. In the second form, racism encourages people to shun their own culture. The third issue that emerged from the interviews was the use of racism against other minority people as a form of self-protection. One type of racism may give birth to another type of racism in the sense that children facing racism in their daily lives can learn to use it as a way of protecting themselves from the very same racism.

### **3.6 MULTIPLE WAYS OF CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY**

Racism, othering, and stereotyping have far reaching consequences in people's lives. Most importantly, they necessitate strategic functioning in the politics of everyday life. This is partly done by the process of identity construction. There are many ways that people resist and respond to racism and construct an identity. As will be discussed, in some cases the way people construct an identity is by resisting the identification of racism, or denying the presence of racism. In other cases they do it by absorbing racial stereotypes, or, by rejecting the dominant society's culture. Another strategy used in the face of racism is oppositionally active whiteness.

#### **1. Resistance to Identifying racism, or, Denial of Racism as a Way of Constructing Identity**

The interviews pointed to the denial of the presence of racism, othering, or stereotyping as one way that people construct an identity. As will be discussed, this kind of identity shows not only a resistance to identify racism, othering, or stereotyping



but also a tendency to deny the presence of the existence of these phenomena. In other words, people are not necessarily unaware of the presence of racism but there is a tendency in them to deny its presence. Another characteristic of this identity construction, which was seen in one interview, is to defend the majority society for the way it treats the minority people and to justify it to a certain degree. For example, when asked, "How do you think Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians?" the respondent replied,

I think we just eat different food, um like food, and then we dress differently, and some of the things we are just different from them. Our colour, skin colour is different. Whereas, people from Italy, Netherlands, and all those countries, because they have the same coloured skin, they have the same culture basically. So, for them they think they are all Canadians, but when they see us they right away can say from our skin colour that we are from different part of the world (even when they are also from different parts of the world) but they can yeah, because they have the same culture, the same skin colour and same . . .

In the above quote, instead of discussing how Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians the respondent started discussing why Euro-Canadians perceive Indo-Canadians 'differently,' which she attributes to different food, different way of dressing up, and different skin colour.

Q. How do you think they perceive South Asian Canadians?

A. They think we have a different culture, we eat different food, and we are a little different from them. Of course, like it's obvious, like . . . yeah. (I'm sorry, what's obvious?) So far I think most of them have respect for us. Because most of our people are highly educated, we don't have problems with the language, um . . .

Here the respondent is saying that Euro-Canadians respect Indo-Canadians and she attributes it to the fact that Indo-Canadians are highly educated and know the language. But when I asked her if she thinks that people who are not highly educated

and do not know the language are looked at differently she denied any knowledge of that.

**Q.** If they were not highly educated and could not speak proper English, then do you think there will be a difference?

**A.** Um no I don't think so, but it's hard to say. But I think that what has happened like in Thunder Bay our East Indian community is very small. So lots of people who are not exposed to our culture and our food and . . . so sometimes they do come and ask us different things about our culture and . . . because they want to know. But maybe in bigger cities they might have a different perspective. But in Thunder Bay because being a small community lots of Canadians [Euro-Canadians] don't know much about our culture.

**Q.** Do you think that in bigger cities there are a lot of assumptions about Indo-Canadians?

**A.** I don't know, it's very hard to say. Because I came here a long time ago and like I have a lot of Canadian [Euro-Canadian] friends and it's very hard to say. And I came from a different country too like from East Africa. So when I came here I didn't have problems of the language, and I used to wear pants back home in Africa. I had short hair and I just fitted right in. Then I had worked back home in the school so . . . as a secretary. So like for me it wasn't that big of a shock. And in my office where I worked, then after that I had another job in the office and there were even European colleagues too. So like for me . . . and there were African colleagues too. So I came from a cosmopolitan country. So for me it was not a big shock. And I didn't find too many problems.

**Q.** Do you think that Indo-Canadians who don't have a good knowledge of English or who don't wear

**A.** [interrupts] No no I am not saying that, no, no. I am saying that . . . (Well, do you feel that they have a more difficult time?) Like because I talked to a few people when I came to Canada and they found it a little harder to wear these English clothes and they had a little problem mixing with Canadians [Euro-Canadians]. Whereas, when we came here so many of our close friends were Canadians [Euro-Canadians] and we used to go out camping together and we were doing so many things together and we really enjoyed ourselves. Whereas, some people had a hard time. They were missing home, like India. They came directly from India and they find it very difficult to adjust to this life. That's what I'm saying. I'm not saying that it was like . . . but I don't know. So for them they left their families behind.

**Q. So how do you think Euro-Canadians perceive such people?**

**A. It's very hard to say . . . but when I came here I didn't find any problems. Maybe in bigger cities they might have a different perspective of our Indian people because our people do live in a ghetto, like in Toronto. They just cling to their own culture and their own food and everything and they don't want to mix in with other Canadians and they [Euro-Canadians] might be thinking that we just don't want to mix in with other people but it's not true.**

**Q. How do you perceive Euro-Canadians?**

**A. I think they are nice people. They are really friendly. So far I haven't found any problems with them. It's really hard to say (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).**

The respondent seems very proud of the fact that she knew English before she came to Canada, wore English clothes, had short hair, and was able to blend in easily. The respondent was very critical of the Indo-Canadian community and said that they "live in a ghetto," and "cling to their culture and their own food."

This respondent seemed very defensive during the interview. It is interesting to note that here the respondent is criticizing other members of the community for clinging to their own culture and their own food, however, in another section of the interview when asked what food she cooks in the house she said, "East Indian vegetarian. We do not eat meat" (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

Another time, in an informal setting, while in conversation with a male of Middle Eastern origin - who was arguing that racism does not exist in Thunder Bay - the same respondent pointed towards the skin on the back of her hand and said that it's the brown skin that makes the difference. The respondent explained to the other person that since he had a lighter skin colour he could pass for an Italian (a common ethnic

group in Thunder Bay), therefore, he did not experience any racism.

A similar tendency was seen in another interview. When I asked the respondent, "How do you think Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians?" the respondent became very defensive and replied that she does not have any problems with them:

I don't have any problems [very defensive]. I never had any problems with the Canadian [Euro-Canadian] friends that I have. Yes, I do come across people, they are biased or prejudiced just because we are different or . . . but that doesn't bother me (#12, first-generation woman, age 34, arrived at the age of 28).

I asked the respondent if she thinks that the media have a part to play in the way South Asian Canadians are perceived and she responded with "no comments there."

A. From media? Um no comments there because everyone has their own view of interpreting things and putting it down.

Q. What's the impression that you get?

A. I don't know.

Q. How do you perceive Euro-Canadians?

A. I have no problems. (Well, it doesn't have to be problems . . .) No, I didn't mean it in that sense. When I said I don't have any problems . . . in the sense that to me it's fine. Like if they are willing to accept the way I am with my background . . . I know culturally there might be a little difference between myself and Canadians [Euro-Canadians] um if they are willing to accept me as I am I don't think I should see any problems in accepting the way they are.

In the above example, the respondent's tendency to be defensive and resistant to identify any racism, or stereotyping comes through very strongly. The other form of this identity is the tendency to ignore racism, othering, and stereotyping. It is interesting to note that in some instances even when people can clearly cite incidents

of racism they feel very uncomfortable acknowledging it and are very cautious about suggesting that it is a typical experience. In one interview, for example, when asked, "How do you think Euro-Canadians perceive Indo-Canadians?" the first-generation woman responded with, "As far as I know they don't perceive them in any bad way. I'll tell you frankly that they respect us." And right after that she came up with several incidents of racism and stereotyping that happened with her at her workplace:

On T.V. a white man saw that Indians worship cows. Now, in India Indians worship something . . . we people respect everything. We have taken something from some one then we respect that. There are so many gods and everything these people think it's a mess that how come there are so many gods. We give respect to everything we feel is worthy of respect according to the Indian culture. He saw something on cows that they worship cows and came here and started saying that "you Indians are fools." I said "why? How we are fools?" And he replied that "you know last night I saw on T.V. that you people worship cows and that you don't eat beef." I said "yes, cow is so great. We worship cows because cow gives us a lot. Why shouldn't we worship it?" And he said, "I'll never do that. My family is dying of hunger and cow is standing in my house, I'll cut it and eat it and feed my family." I said to him "If you are not a fool then what are you?" He said "why?" I said, "You decided that one day you would cut it and eat it. But what would you eat the second day?" I said, "You are telling me that Indians are fools. Indian can feed his family daily by milking the cow. He can make some money by even selling its milk. So he can feed his family. That's why he worshipped the cow. The calf that he gets from it he can sell it and get some money, or he can even plough his field with it. But what did you do? You ate it and finished it. What can you get from it? What will you do the next day?" He didn't say anything and left (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

The above example illustrates that some people are very cautious around the topic of racism and even when they can clearly cite incidents that are racist they are reluctant to name them or talk about them as typical experiences.

The tendency to ignore racism and othering was also evident among second-generation respondents. In one incident, for example, the respondent discussed how

Euro-Canadians make assumptions about 'other' people's intolerance to cold weather.

Just the other day, actually, well not the other day but a little while ago I was in a place where I didn't know many people and there were a lot of other women that I had met and men too. And we were just walking to a different room to put our jackets away and we were just talking casually about the weather and saying, "No, it's just too cold for me" and she said, "Oh! your people must like it warm." I just . . . I mean she was a lot older so I just left it at that. I'm not going to "I'm Canadian." She just didn't realize and so I just laughed at myself because it happens a lot. But it's little things so you just kind of push it aside (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

The above example shows how people can be made to feel 'othered' by seemingly innocent remarks made by Euro-Canadian people. Again, as in the other examples, the respondent decided to ignore the racist remark made by the woman and convinced herself that the woman just did not realize what she was saying.

## **2. Absorption of Racial and Cultural Stereotypes as a Way of Constructing Identity.**

Another way people construct their identity in relation to racism, othering, and stereotyping is by absorbing racial and cultural stereotypes. In many instances people themselves have absorbed stereotypes of their own cultures so that even when they talk about their own behaviour when they return to India their description of why they do, or do not do, certain things is based on those stereotypes. In one instance, for example, around the choice of clothing, one respondent said that she did not wear western clothes in India because the culture was very conservative:

Where I'm from in India it's very conservative. So when I go there . . . I usually do this out of respect for my grand-parents, not to look odd in front of my grandparents and their community, a such a small tightknit community, um I don't usually [wear western clothes].

Yet, when asked why she does not wear Indian clothes in Canada her response was of a different nature - something about her own comfort level.

It's not because I would be embarrassed. It just would be what I am conveniently comfortable for. And I don't have . . . you know, in India you can go buy suits, cotton ones, comfortable ones, you can't do that as much here and it's much expensive here. So you are just used to, you know, wearing you own jeans and that's what you're comfortable in or dress pants or whatever, skirts, dresses, so . . . (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

This example points out that people themselves have absorbed stereotypes and might not even be aware of it when they are discussing issues like that. The same example also illustrates that it is very difficult for people to admit that they do not do certain things because of negative perceptions of the dominant society. This idea comes through in the respondent's reason for not wearing Indian clothes which is attributed by her to her comfort level and not to embarrassment.

In other instances even when people are aware of the stereotypes of their culture and believe that it is a misconstrued view they often find themselves unable to avoid being affected by the stereotypes. In one instance, for example, the respondent discussed the stereotypes of 'arranged marriage' and explained that these images are incorrect and distorted. The respondent discussed the stereotype of 'arranged marriages' as two individuals just being thrown together and having no say in the matter at all. The respondent then talked at length about how, according to her, the system actually works:

But people don't realize that it's not really . . . I mean it's not really arranged so to speak. It's just kind of two families kind of get together and maybe they will say, well maybe two people would like to meet or something. Or, maybe they would enjoy each other's company, or, they have similar interest whatever. And

then they will see, after they have met each other if they like each other and maybe they will stay for a while, it will work out or it won't (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

Yet, when talking about how she responds to people when they ask her if she is going to have an 'arranged marriage' the respondent admitted that she becomes defensive and makes it clear to everyone that she is not.

But then I find myself . . . it's almost . . . I'm not offended but I kind of feel a little bit different like awkward when that question comes up. I just feel a little bit awkward almost because I feel like I have to defend myself, "No! I'm not. I am not going to get arranged marriage (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

The above example illustrates that people are affected by the stereotypes of their own cultures and these often guide their own actions and behaviours. Their decision to engage in or not to engage in certain cultural practices is affected by how those practices are perceived by the dominant society.

There is another aspect to the identity of some of the members of Indo-Canadian community in Thunder Bay which is interesting in that on the one hand they identify with India and on the other hand, stereotype it. I became aware of this type of identity while interacting with my community in informal settings. In these settings I observed some of the second-generation people of Indian origin having a lot of fun out of describing places in India as 'filthy' and 'dirty.' This maybe a phenomenon of second-generation people and suggests a distancing process having taken place for second-generation people where they absorb the negative images of India prevalent in Canada and wish to identify more with the dominant society. The fact that none of the respondents during the formal interview sessions discussed India in the above



mentioned manner points towards the issue of the difference between formalized interviews and informal settings. This difference brings into light the flexibility and fluidity of identity. In informal settings they are wanting to create distance from their South Asian background and seem more comfortable in reproducing stereotypes while in formal settings they do not.

### **3. Rejecting the dominant culture as a way of constructing identity**

One interview points towards an identity construction which rejects the dominant culture. As discussed previously, when asked, "How do you refer to yourself?" this respondent's answer was:

I say that I'm a Hindu Indian. I have not even taken the Canadian citizenship so I can't call myself Canadian. I am living here for my son and my husband (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

When asked how she is raising or has raised her children the respondent said that she wished to raise her children the Indian way and therefore when her kids were little she went back to India and lived there until the kids were all grown up.

We raised our kids with Indian values. Our kids themselves liked the Indian ways. That's the only reason that I went back to India from America because my daughter was 7 years old and my son was 2 at that time. I went to India because we thought if we live here for a long period of time when the kids are growing up then we'll have to live here according to their [Euro-Canadian] way of life and if we want to raise our kids with Indian values then it's better to go to India. Because the kids learn whatever they see. Here the atmosphere is so free and if you like this kind of life then stay here otherwise when the kids grow up and understand what's good for them or bad then come here. For this very reason we went back to India for 16 years. Within those 16 years I never went back. My husband did go twice. And then we made a decision. I said to him if he wanted to stay in America he could stay but I won't go back because if the kids have to be raised with our own values then I said I'll stay here in India. Even before, one time my husband stayed there alone for two and a half years and even then I stayed alone in India. After that too I stayed alone with the kids in

India (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

As can be noted, this respondent felt that in Canada the only culture that her children would be exposed to was the Euro-Canadian culture. Therefore, to her it was important to spend some time back in India with her children so they could get exposed to her own culture. This shows that the training of her cultural practices is important to this respondent's sense of identity and she did not think that to be possible living in the dominant culture. She feels that within the so called multicultural complex of Canada there isn't room for her own culture. This respondent is constructing her identity by rejecting the dominant culture.

#### **4. "Oppositionally Active 'Whiteness'"**

Puar (1995) suggests that "oppositionally active whiteness" describes an identity formation that instead of being assimilatory is strategically reactive. With an identity like this non-European people can fit into dominant European society without absorbing its values. Such an identity is not a result of racism, or rejection by majority European society, rather, it is the "product of critical evaluation and appreciation of one's own culture" (1995:27). In addition to the above mentioned, "Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" can take many other forms which include resisting the dominant culture and dominant ways of life (retaining subjectivity), resisting one's own culture and ways of life as a strategy of dealing with racism (stereotypes of 'oreo,' 'coconut'), participating in certain cultural practices being aware of the negative perceptions of the dominant society (double gaze), and thinking of oneself as a unique person who does not function according to any culture. During the interviews there were a number of

instances when the phenomenon of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" came through sometimes directly and other times in more subtle ways.

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" was evident in the respondents' discussions on the maintenance of cultural clothing, language, food, community functions, system of marriage, and so on. As will be discussed, these discussions point out that people pick and choose elements of their culture while aware of the attitudes of the Euro-Canadian society. "Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" which is an identity formation that shows conformity yet retains subjectivity becomes evident in this idea that when in their own society (their own community), or in their own homes, people may maintain elements that will be considered non-dominant culture.

### **Clothing**

In the second part of the interview I asked respondents, "What kind of clothing do you wear at home or when you go out?" Most of the first-generation respondents said that they wear Indian clothing at home and western clothing when they go out. Most of the second-generation women said that they wear Indian clothes at home when there is a special occasion. Respondents gave several reasons for their preference for wearing Indian clothing at home. These included comfort level, parental expectations, pride in the culture, because they like the opportunity, and because Indian clothes are more beautiful than European clothes. Some of the other responses were as follows:

I like them. I feel comfortable in that environment. Um sometimes its expectations, but a lot of the times it is my own desire too and the comfort level (#4, Second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

Deeper meaning is we don't want to lose our roots. And also it's more

fashionable(#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

It feels good and also I feel comfortable. (Physically comfortable or . . . ?) Yes, physically comfortable (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

One respondent challenged that and said that she finds pants and shirts more comfortable at home.

[I don't wear Indian clothes at home] because its more comfortable to wear pants and shirts at home (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

Respondents also discussed the reasons they do not wear Indian clothing when out in dominant society. In these discussions, the predominant reason that came through was being looked at in a 'different' way.

But mostly pants so that I'm not counted as different from other people here. So people don't look at me in an odd way (#6, first-generation woman, age 39, arrived at the age of 23).

One respondent said that to get respect from the dominant society one has to change a little bit according to that society, otherwise, one feels different from others and feels lonely.

Then if you keep yourself separated you'll feel lonely and the other thing is that other people will think that these people are into themselves (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Although not asked as a question in the interview sessions all of the respondents referred to cultural functions when talking about Indian clothing. All of the second-generation and first-generation respondents said that they like to wear Indian clothes when they attend their own cultural functions. The various reasons given by the respondents include the following: they love the opportunity; it's something

different to wear; Indian clothes are elegant and graceful; and they want to represent their culture at these functions.

Saree is a very graceful dress, the most elegant dress I think. It's very graceful and it adds special grace to special occasions. And Punjabi suit too. It has its own beauty. It's modest and you are so comfortable in it (#7, first-generation woman, age 32, arrived at the age of 25).

I feel good when I wear these clothes. My husband likes them too and I like to wear Indian clothes because it's our party and we want to show our culture there. That's why we wear Indian clothes. And the fact is that Indian clothes look more beautiful than Canadian [Euro-Canadian] clothes (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age 23).

Another respondent said that she wears Indian clothing but does not think about the cultural aspect of it.

I think the way we have been brought up I have been very proud to be what I am. A Canadian and a South Asian woman or a Punjabi woman or even a Punjabi person not even just that I'm a female. So it is . . . I like wearing Indian clothes because I feel proud of who I am too but I don't really think about it too much. It's just something that you do and I do like wearing them (#4, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

The above example again illuminates the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'." On the one hand this respondent participates in this particular practice of her own culture being aware of the dominant society's negative attitudes, on the other hand, she also does not want to think of the cultural aspect of that practice. In other words, she resists and participates in her culture at one and the same time.

### **Food**

Respondents were asked, "What food do you eat in the house and when you go out?" All of the respondents said that they eat Indian food most of the time at home. Seventy five percent of the respondents said that they are vegetarians. These

respondents said that they find it hard to get good vegetarian food outside.

Mostly Indian. When I go out I eat pasta or something like that. But at home when I come home I want Indian food. If one day I skip Indian food I miss that because that's what you are used to (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

[We eat] east Indian vegetarian food. We do not eat meat (#1, first-generation women, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

It is interesting to note that the above respondent, when discussing Euro-Canadians' perceptions of Indo-Canadians, criticized other members of the community for choosing to eat Indian food.

### **Language**

When asked, "What language do you speak in the house?" most of the respondents said that they occasionally speak English but mostly their own mother tongue at home. Eighty nine percent of the first-generation women said that they are teaching or have taught their children to speak, read, and write their mother tongue. All of the second-generation women said that they were taught to speak and/or to read and write their mother tongue. When some of the second-generation respondents discussed the topic of language their discussions reflected the difficulties and fears that their parents had upon arrival in this country and the impact it had on the respondents as children. Respondents found it very hard and sometimes even embarrassing to admit that their parents had to make certain decisions which they realized too late to be not right. Respondents said that their parents realized too late that the dominant society's language would be picked up by the children without much effort but that their own language would come to the children with great difficulty and require much effort

on the parents' part. The following examples show that language is an important part of identity. Children may not recognize the importance of these things but part of their identities as they become adults is the recognition that their cultural identity and their ability to speak, read, and write the language is important to them. While as children it may not be obvious to them, or may not even be important to them why they are doing those things, they can later reflect back on that as adults and regret the fact that they were not able to do more of it.

We had just come from India. Mom and Dad, because this was all new to them um cause it was their first experience which is why . . . I know that they would have, like done things differently if they . . . We would not be able to . . . they were scared us being in the new country we would not be able to understand. So they started to speak English for us to . . . you know. Later on you think, "Oh no! kids will automatically learn English. Keep talking in your own language." Now you think that. But we were lucky enough to still maintain some sort of . . . like you know, we can understand Punjabi and I can get along, cause we have made trips to India and my parents have also been going back and forth. So we can communicate in Punjabi and not as fluent as you know, all of us would like to be. And I know Mom and Dad . . . Like now when I was older I started thinking "Mummy," even Dad, "talk to me in Punjabi so I can pick it up again fluently." But um at times it was like I would have to tell them "You are speaking English," like now I have to tell them. Because they are used to now speaking English to us. So their response, you know, it's back and forth now. But they are really, like they wish . . . Like they made us learn Punjabi in reading and writing. And the speaking part was just an accident. They kind of "Oh, we should have done this," 'cause it's very important to them and it's very important to me now I see. But when we were forced to in India we visited a couple of weeks, I think I was 11 or 12 and Papa hired a friend who is a Punjabi teacher who actually just volunteered though. He'll teach us an hour a day. And we didn't like it because we thought we are on our vacation. Like we did not want to be learning, you know [chuckling]. And that's the biggest like happiness I have when I look at it that we did do it 'cause we can read the language and write it though we can't practice it as much. But I can easily get it (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

In some ways I am disappointed. There's a lot of aspects of my culture that I don't have you know. And again language I always tell them that language . . .

we can speak it but we can't write or read it. If they had spent a little bit of time sitting us down and we did have enough of a community too. Because we had my Aunts and Uncles and everybody else but it wasn't a priority so (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

The second example brings out the inter-generational conflict in that it shows how parents can easily end up being blamed by their children for many things whether or not they are guilty of those things. The example can also be linked to the assumptions that the majority European society makes about racial minority parenting (Puar 1995). The dominant society often accuses minority people of forcing their children to retain aspects of their cultures without realizing that it might be regarded as an important aspect of identity by their children when they become adults.

#### **Participation in community functions**

Respondents were asked, "Do you participate in any Asian community functions?" All of the first-generation and second-generation respondents said that they do. This discussion again points out the identity formation of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'." Even when people are aware of the dominant society's perspective, they are still maintaining their own sense of diversity by participating in their own community functions. Respondents said that the reason they participate in these functions is because they enjoy these functions, it is a good way of passing on the culture to children, they do not have to explain context, they like to get together with their community and that they get to know other cultures from different parts of India and share their food.

We represent our Indian culture, we share our food, the different variety of food. They can bring their own different items. We take our own Gujarati, Punjabi, like



different items. So you taste different foods, you see different cultures. All provinces are different food wise, clothes wise, and language wise. So that is why we meet each other (#10, first-generation woman, age 49, arrived at the age of 30).

The above example illustrates the heterogeneous nature of the sub-continent of India and its cultures, a fact which is often not recognized. It is usually assumed that the eastern world is one homogeneous entity possessing a homogeneous culture. Ignored is the fact that even within one country different cultures exist as is pointed out by the above example.

For some of the respondents religion and culture are strongly interlinked. As the following example illustrates religion can be an important dimension of maintaining an identity. In the absence of this aspect of the culture people can feel a sense of loss and also do not feel that they are benefitting from participating in the community functions. In the absence of her religious community in Thunder Bay one respondent does not find Indo-Canadian community functions of much use as far as retaining her culture is concerned. This respondent said that the only reason she participates in these functions is to get together with the community members and that as far as her children are concerned she does not think that they are learning anything from these functions. She attributed the reason to the themes of these functions which she said is usually on Hinduism or some other festival.

The kids are aware of these but at the same time I cannot relate to them because I cannot tell them or explain to them most of it because it's not what we belong to. When it comes to the religion part of it. That's hard for me because I teach them . . . we have our own little celebration at home but the community celebration that we would have like say for example, if we were in Toronto they would see it enough bigger . . . and they would see the significance of that

festival rather than here just you know the four of us. I do it here in my own house but you know they don't really see it um the way it should be (#12, first-generation woman, age 34, arrived at the age of 28).

### **Reflections on the distinctness and the richness of culture**

Respondents were asked how they perceive Euro-Canadians and what differences they see between Euro-Canadians and Indo-Canadians. This discussion again points towards "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" in that although they are living in the majority Euro-Canadian society they still have their own perspective and are maintaining an interesting connection to their own culture. The respondents said that the differences are mostly cultural<sup>2</sup>. Because of their culture Euro-Canadians are different in some ways and they have a different outlook on certain things. The difference in outlook was discussed in relationship to children, education, food, parental support, notions of etiquette and mannerism, and marriage. The difference with respect to parental support was emphasized frequently when discussing the differences between the two cultures.

I think again with Indian families they are more . . . there's more structure and there's more importance on the family because . . . and there is more reliance like you can depend on your family more. Here you . . . Kids in Indian families know that their parents are not going to kick them out at the age of 16 you know (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

Like parents, they don't have the parental support that they need. Whereas we do. Our parents will go . . . jump over backwards to put us through education and whatever else that we need in life. There's a lot of the Canadian [Euro-Canadian] generation they don't. And they find it really really lacking in that type of thing. I love and admire my parents for what they have done for us. Like

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<sup>2</sup>. It should be noted that this is an area in which the class, or caste background of the respondents maybe reflected. None of these respondents come from lowest class or caste background either in India or in Canada.

those are the things that you would find and then there's mutual respect in a lot of ways between parents and kids. Like here, my parents would never say to me that "you are 26, now get the hell out of the house," you know, but here most of the families will. Like you know after 16 onwards especially when the kid gets to be 18, "Okay, well now you can go on your own. We want our freedom." Parents think more for their freedom than putting the kid through school or whatever (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

Respondents said that at that age young people need to have some guidance from parents as to which direction they should go and also on how to hold their life together. Some of the respondents discussed the difference with regard to education. Respondents said that in the European cultures education is not given as much importance as in the Indian cultures.

Value of education is . . . there is a big difference. I find that Europeans [Euro-Canadians] they don't put that much emphasis on the value of education. Whereas you know, in our culture, education is everything. It's your freedom. There is more emphasis on education (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

One respondent discussed the different notions of etiquette and manners in two cultures. The respondent described Euro-Canadians as "very free spirited" and "in one extreme to the other."

Um if they want to go out at 2 o'clock in the morning they just get up and go. Whereas, we would have to wait or die or something would have to have happened before we can leave at that time of the morning from our home

At another point the same respondent said,

There's a lot of them that are in one extreme to the other like you know they have . . . because we have different understanding as to how to do certain things, they don't feel anything about . . . you would be sitting with them and the next thing you know, they are making passes at somebody else and they are going . . . [laughing]. Quite difficult for us to . . . (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

Marriage was also given as an example of the different outlook. Some of the respondents said they think that even after getting married Euro-Canadians are not able to derive a sense of security from their marriages and feel very insecure.

They are . . . even though they get married they are insecure here. It's like once you get married in India I think they are more secure in stuff like you don't think of divorce or anything. It happens it happens but you don't think, hey I this and that. But here I think they do think (#5, second-generation woman, age 22, arrived at the age of 16).

Some of the respondents said that because of the cultural difference Euro-Canadians are unable to comprehend certain things in life. One respondent gave the example of being vegetarian and said that "it's totally beyond their [Euro-Canadians'] comprehension."

One other difference discussed was 'a sense of culture.' One respondent said that Euro-Canadians are always searching for a sense of culture and that even when they come from a wide variety of cultures they don't have a sense of community and cultural identity. The respondent also added that Thunder Bay is a little bit different because there is a strong Italian community and some other European communities that have retained quite a bit of their cultures.

### **Differences and similarities between Indo-Canadian and Euro-Canadian friends**

Respondents were asked if they had South Asian Canadian friends in Thunder Bay. Most of the respondents said they did. Other respondents said that they did not, or that their friends had moved away. These respondents said that they missed having friends with a South Asian background. For most of the respondents not having friends

with South Asian background meant not having anyone who shares the same culture, and having friends with a European background meant having to explain the context more often. Respondents said that it feels good to talk to a friend who is from the same background and shares similar experiences.

You have to explain a lot more contextual things. There is a lot more explaining to do. With friends from similar background you don't really . . . some things just go unsaid, you can say something and you know that the person understands you (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

Respondents also talked about the differences between their South Asian Canadian friends and their Euro-Canadian friends. Respondents discussed the differences in terms of difference in problems, difference in outlook on many things, difference in the ability to comprehend certain things, and parental support. One respondent said that her Euro-Canadian friends have different problems because of their cultural practices and the cultural practice of having boyfriends and girlfriends was also referred to.

In a lot of ways they are very different 'cause they have boyfriends. They'll say, "Oh . . .," you make plans with them, their boyfriends will call and say, "Oh, I'm making plans for us" and the next thing you know your plans are cancelled. Because we don't have that in our culture we don't have to worry about things like that other than just from the parents' perspective (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

### **'Arranged' marriages**

As discussed earlier, one of the topics that was discussed in the interviews was the images of 'arranged marriage'<sup>3</sup> prevalent in Euro Canadian society. When asked

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<sup>3</sup>. It should be noted that no such term exists in any of the Indian languages. Therefore, ultimately, this term is just an ethnocentric construction which reflects Eurocentric ideas about what a normal marriage is. This is again an example of the

how they respond to such images, some of the respondents said that they tell Euro-Canadians that they are quite happy with it. One respondent said that she asks people for their definition of 'arranged marriage' first and then she gives her own. Some of the other responses were as follows:

I talk a lot every time you know if I get a picture in the mail, Mom wants me to see this boy or this boy called you know, I'm pretty open about it, "oh look I got this picture from this boy, what do you think? (#8, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

I basically tell them we don't have things called arranged marriages. But we do look for a person who is equally good for us like you know, financially and everything else. But we look more for our parents' blessing as well. Like you know our parents will go and talk to his parents and that's how things . . . but that doesn't necessarily mean that things are being arranged. It's just that that's how we have dealt with it. (#13, second generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

All of the respondents said that they like the Indian system of marriage. The various reasons that the respondents gave in its favour were parental support in finding a mate, parental support in case something goes wrong, unity in the family, parental protection, and the cultural preference for the kids to find the right match and to stick with that marriage for the rest of their lives.

I find that the marriage process, the arranged marriages quote unquote it's more of a screening process and the social network is supporting you. Here [in the Euro-Canadian society] you are out to the wolves by yourself and it's scary (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

They [Euro Canadians] don't have that support. Um most of the people here don't even want any. Like they don't want their parents to interfere. Whereas, we are different. Um I would love my parents' support into finding somebody

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dominant 'gaze' where Euro-Canadian approaches to marriage are considered normative and practices that do not match that are considered 'other' or are named as different.

because they can look into his background and family background. Then I don't have to worry about any of that and I know they'll do the best for me (# 13, second generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

I think arranged marriage is better because if something goes wrong then parents are behind you. They can help you. They are behind you. But here I don't know how they get the support. Maybe there is welfare and other things, you know, they will help you out. But our system is a little different. Support from the family members and friends means a lot to us rather than money (# 10, second-generation woman, age 49, arrived at the age of 30).

I think that's good because there's family support there and if something goes wrong there is family there to support and help you to make it better and I think that way you don't have too much responsibility on your shoulders. Because you know parents are there and you are safe. Parents' protection is there. I like that. We don't have that much freedom so we don't explore too much. It's not good either because sometimes you don't know what you are doing and what choices you want to make and like that time parents are helping you (#15, first-generation woman, age 22, arrived at the age of 16).

It's totally like a dating service but you're entrusting it in people who love you and care rather than a computer or a person who doesn't know you at all like these services do (#11, second generation woman, age 27).

Many respondents said that the Indian system of marriage is not very different from the European system of marriage, and that they are just two different methods but with the same purpose.

You can meet the best person um through a friend or your parents or by chance out of functions you know. It's just a . . . it's all a matter of meeting the right person. It can happen any way you want. So it's not like . . . I just try to explain to them that it's just a method but the purpose is the same as any other method you know (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

One first-generation respondent said that knowing a person for a long time and finding out about their habits is not of great use because habits can change after marriage.

I also told them even my girls better . . . although I'm not going to force arranged

marriages but I tell them that here you are living together and you are looking for some habits, okay. Because you want to know the person. That means you are just looking for habits. So after marriage habits change and you get divorced. So it's better to know little and get married and that's it. That goes well too (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

A few of the respondents gave examples of their own marriage. From what the respondents said three kinds of Indian marriages come into light. The marriages that used to take place in the past, the marriages that take place now, and the marriages that some of the respondents referred to as "love-cum-arranged marriage" or love, as well as, arranged marriage.

My marriage was love-cum-arranged marriage. I told my husband to come to my place and ask my parents about the marriage. I told him I won't say yes before they say yes. That's how we got married (# 9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

My marriage, in a way was arranged marriage but me and my husband we knew each other from before for a year or so. He used to come to our house. He used to meet with everyone, my mother, my brother, my sister-in-law and everyone. Then one day his father came and said to my mother that my son would like to marry your daughter. So in a way it seems like an arranged marriage but in another way it is also a love marriage. Then we got engaged and got married after two years. So which means we had more than three years to get to know each other. The same happened with my daughter. They were working in the same bank and used to travel by the same train to their job. That boy asked my daughter for marriage, she replied that he will have to get his parents to talk to her parents. So the next day his parents came over to our place. We did not even know these people. Then they asked us if we knew the boy who travelled with our daughter. We said "yes" that we knew him. They said that they had come to propose the marriage of their son to our daughter. So even when we didn't know them, but these two knew each other (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

There was a time when people did not see their marriage partners before marriage but they did not mind that because they were brought up like that. They had an image of a marriage partner in their mind and that's how they did it (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).



One respondent differentiated between what she said she believed to be two kinds of 'arranged marriages':

I think there are two kinds of arranged marriages. Like one arranged marriage like the parents getting together and what I think of it boy and girl having no say at all. But there's another kind of arranged marriage where boy and girl do have the right to say yes or no. But those are two different kinds. But this the first one the forced one it shouldn't be happening (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

Some of the first-generation respondents said that in the western marriage system love comes before the marriage, whereas in the Indian marriage system love develops after the marriage.

Like I say in western marriages they first love each other and then they get married. In our society they get married and then they start loving each other. That's the way it is and it works both ways (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

The ideas in the above quote are also illustrated in Bapsi Sidhwa's (1994) story which illustrates that Indian system of marriage is an ongoing process in which love keeps developing even after marriage and does not end with marriage.

Most of the respondents said that even when the boy and the girl did not have any say in the marriage process people did not feel constrained by that. They accepted it because it was the tradition at that time. Respondents pointed out that even in those marriages parents used to look after all those things that girls and boys themselves look after in the Euro-Canadian society and that parents still do intervene and look after those things. Even when young people meet and decide to get married parents are always involved in the final decision making.

I have explained to them [Euro Canadians] that this used to happen before. But

even those arranged marriages parents used to look after those things that here in Euro Canadian society girls and boys themselves look after. Back home when those kinds of marriages took place or even now parents look after those things. But these days in India even when girls and boys find each other parents still intervene and arrange everything (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

Some of the first-generation respondents said that people do not think about life seriously before marriage and that parents in the past, and even now, set up everything keeping the child in mind, the culture in mind, and the family in mind. Most of the respondents felt that people are happier in these marriages. One respondent thinks that Euro-Canadians stay unhappy even when they 'fall in love' first and then get married and she attributes the reason to the western culture in which more importance is given to physical attraction.

These people [Euro-Canadians] even after love marriages stay unhappy. I mean they fall in love first and then get married but are they happy? After just a few days they leave their partners. So where is the happiness? My thinking is that in their culture they only physically get attracted to each other. And according to the Indian culture we get attracted mentally, spiritually, from the soul. Not physically. Physical attraction doesn't last long. Then they want new attraction and that's why in their whole life they keep running after physical attraction (#16, second-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

One respondent described how second-generation Indo-Canadians internalize the racism and start looking at their own culture from the eyes of the dominant society. This respondent talked about the prevalent view and the stereotypical image of Indian marriages, and without even having any experience with the system she looked down upon it. The respondent explained that when she herself went through the process her outlook changed.

Again, I myself thought it was like that too, to a point, until you have to go

through the process yourself and again I find that my viewpoint has changed quite a bit you know. Before it was, "Oh, Mom you are not going to make me marry some guy I don't even . . . And then you hear sometimes you are not treated properly. You are not marrying a boy you are marrying a family. so you hear all these horror stories and you know . . . And then you realize it's not like that. It's more of a screening process (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

Another respondent had a different opinion and said that both the boy's and the girl's families should have an input into the marriage because in her culture people marry into the family.

In our culture we don't marry just the person. We marry into the family. So it's nice if both the families have input into it and they can agree upon things and then the boy and the girl obviously have to interact with each other but it's always nice to have to be able to get along with his family as well as your own (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

Respondents were asked what they are going to do about their own children's marriages. Some of the respondents said that since their children are little at the time they cannot say anything about that. Some of the other respondents said that the way they have raised their children they are confident that they can make the right choices.

Well, we are not very fussy but I think we have raised them good enough that they will take our advice and even I think they can make the decision well (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

One respondent said that she is flexible as to how her sons want to get married and that if her sons want her to find the girls she will do that and if they find the girls themselves she will agree to that too. The respondent said that the only thing that she desires is for the girls to be of Indian origin. I asked the respondent if there was a reason for that, and she said that in the long run her sons might not be happy with a Euro-Canadian woman.

Because they can live together more happily with Indian. With a white woman they might not be so happy in the long term. Because it'll be the union of two different cultures, two different ways. Maybe their kids will have the same problems. They won't be that much happy (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Another respondent said,

[W]e have also left it up to them if they find the right girl in the city where they are living they can go ahead and get married. Doesn't matter even if the girls are from this society, like, or . . . (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

### **Other Areas and Instances of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'"**

Oppositionally active whiteness was also evident in many interviews when respondents discussed the differences between the European and the Indian cultures with the practice of "dating" as a predominant topic of discussion. Most of the second-generation respondents, while discussing their views on this practice said that there are things they like about the Euro-Canadian culture, but they do not agree with the practice of 'dating.' One respondent showed appreciation of her parents for the way they had brought her up and said that she would raise her children the same way as far as the practice of 'dating' is concerned.

Um the other difference with you know, the way the dating and stuff like that is different too. Um there's not as much . . . There's so much emphasis on finding a mate early, like it doesn't matter how there's an age. But to me it's different for me because I don't agree with young people um dating, thinking about those things at that age when you should be trying to figure yourself out. If you don't you don't know yourself out . . . even 16 or 17 you think, "Oh, that's a good age" but is it? I didn't know myself at 16, 17 why would I try to get to know someone else if I didn't know myself. So yeah, that's one thing like that has stuck to me out of everything in the culture. There's things that I like about Canadian [Euro-Canadian] culture but one thing I know and I didn't see when I was younger is that that's the way I want to bring about my kids as far as you know dating and finding somebody . . . I love the way my parents . . . I look back and I say,

"Thank God I didn't start dating and go through all that at that age you know (#9, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" shows in this respondent's resistance to the dominant cultural practices and the way she evaluates the good and the bad in the two cultures and arrives at her own conclusions. The same respondent, at another point in the interview, gave the example of the practice of "dating" as a not very useful practice as far as getting married is concerned. This again is "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" in that the respondent manages to keep her perspective while aware of the assumptions of the dominant society:

Like timing is not of essence because if the two people that are right for each other . . . because people who've been dating 8, 9 years still get divorced. So what would you say that knowing each other longer makes it better? (#11, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

The respondent again showed her ability to critically evaluate both cultures and systems of marriages within those cultures arriving at the conclusion that one system is not better than the other.

At another point in the interview the respondent said that what she does in life now is not because she's been influenced by the Euro-Canadian culture, or because she is an East Indian, but she does it because she finds it comfortable.

In society now I don't consider myself . . . even though I have a . . . I've had um you know, Euro-Canadian culture influence and have adapted to certain life-styles as they have you know, part of their life-style and maintained my own. I don't feel like I've lost any of my . . . I consider myself East Indian. I don't think I've um . . . I always consider myself a unique individual in society. Um because I do every thing not because there's a culture but what is me. And if it happens to fall along that line it's not because I'm East Indian or because I'm in Euro Canadian culture. It's because it's comfortable in my skin. Um so that way I don't feel like you know, I'm following into their culture and losing mine or I'm

totally mine and not, not gaining their's.

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" comes through in this respondent's resistance to be restricted to either way of life. It is because of "oppositionally active whiteness" that what she does or does not do is not necessarily governed by any particular culture, but by what she has carefully evaluated to be the right thing to do.

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" is a strategy that enables people to function 'normally' in the dominant society without giving up their own identity. Even after adopting the dominant society's ways of life people may still have their own perspective on those practices which again helps them to retain their internal identity and to empower their subjectivity. These ideas can be illustrated in one example, where the respondent discussed why she doesn't wear Indian clothes when she is out in the dominant society. The respondent said that she wears dominant cultural clothing because everybody else wears it and that even when she wears these clothes she does not forget who she is inside.

Because we are in Canada. If you are going to socialize, you wear as they say, you do as Romans do. But that doesn't necessarily mean you forget who you are inside. Like your . . . I believe your clothes don't make you who you are. so you can dress me up and make me turn green but I will still be who I am inside (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

The example again points to the identity formation of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" through which people do certain things being aware of the dominant society's perceptions but still are able to retain internal identity.

Some of the respondents discussed how they deal with the cultural differences when they are with their Euro-Canadian friends. One respondent said that some of her

Euro-Canadian friends do not understand her cultural behaviour and want to change her, but she would not let them because that is not who she is.

A couple of my friends understand my traditional ways [her cultural ways] of living, like you know, if I go out they won't let me . . . like they are non-smokers too so they won't let me touch it, do anything like that because I just fit in with them. They understand and there are a few of them who don't. They want to change me. Like change me to the Canadian [Euro-Canadian] way and I won't do that because that's not who I am (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

The phenomenon of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" is again evident in the way this respondent shows resistance to her friends' efforts to change her. Other examples of this identity construction could be seen when the respondents discussed the topic of 'arranged marriages.' As discussed earlier, one of the questions that the respondents were asked was how they respond to the stereotypical questions on Indian marriages. As previously discussed, one respondent said,

I talk a lot every time you know if I get a picture in the mail, Mom wants me to see this boy or this boy called you know, I'm pretty open about it, "Oh look! I got this picture from this boy. What do you think? (#8, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" comes through very strongly in the above example in the respondent's desire to be open about her participation in this system of marriage being aware of the stereotypes associated with it. The respondent engages in this behaviour by showing everyone the pictures and by asking them "What do you think?" even when she is aware that this system is looked down upon by the Euro-Canadian society. "Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" can be seen in another statement made by the same respondent in which she compared the two systems of marriages

and said that in the Indian system of marriage the social network is supporting women, whereas, in the Euro-Canadian system of marriage, "you are out to the wolves by yourself" - a statement made being aware of the stereotypes of 'arranged marriage' (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

The themes discussed in the interviews illustrated that people's identities are flexible and fluid and not fixed. It became evident that the way people identify themselves can incorporate more than one identity depending on the context. In some instances, people show inability to identify themselves in a particular way unless presented with a particular context. In other instances people showed a connection to more than one identity without even being aware of it.

All of the respondents showed awareness of racism in their lives. Most of the respondents discussed their experiences with racism by giving examples from their own lives. Some of the respondents showed reluctance to talk about it. Some of the areas where respondents experienced racism, othering, and stereotyping were, clothing, Indian marriages, religion, Canadian education system, and media portrayals of non-European cultures. Many respondents discussed how racism had impacted their lives. Use of racism as protection, internalization of racism, and denying one's own culture were some of the effects of racism as discussed by respondents. Racism impacts people's lives in such a way that they have to come up with strategies to cope with their everyday lives. These strategies help people to construct their identities when faced with racism. Interviews pointed towards four different ways of constructing identity. In



the first form of identity construction people showed reluctance to identify racism even when they could cite particular incidents of racism. Another side of this type of identity construction was to hold other minority people responsible for the racism they experience. The second type of identity construction was to absorb stereotypes of its own culture. In the third type identity is constructed by rejecting the dominant culture. The fourth one shows conformity with the majority European culture, and yet manages to retain internal identity by manipulating and empowering subjectivity.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

As previously discussed there are many aspects of identity and many ways of constructing identity. The focus of this chapter is gender identity as it relates to cultural identity. It is important to recognize that gender identity and cultural identity are interlinked and experienced at one and the same time. The chapter also deals with how women in the South Asian Canadian community perceive their roles as women and construct their gender identity. Detailed statements from the respondents are used to illustrate how they look at their roles in the family, how their roles are similar to or different from previous generations, whether they see their roles as similar to , or different from the roles of women in Euro-Canadian society and how they integrate their ethnic identity with their gender identity. Flexibility and fluidity of identity, and the identity formation of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" will also be elaborated.

### **4.2 WOMEN'S ROLES**

In the third section of the interviews I asked the respondents, "What do you think women's roles are like in India?" In answer to this question several different kinds of responses came to light. Some respondents discussed the question in terms of women's status in India. These respondents discussed issues such as oppression, freedom, equality, inequality, and so on, and also made comparisons with women's roles in the Euro-Canadian society. Some of these respondents said that there is not as much freedom generally in India as there is within the Euro-Canadian society in Canada, but just as much as there should be. Most of these respondents perceived the

condition of women in India to be better compared to the condition of women in Euro-Canadian society. While these respondents believed in freedom they also stressed that there should be some sort of discipline too.

I think a woman . . . women even there are educated. There is freedom, not as much as here but as much as there should be. (Can you give examples?) Jobs etc., in education too they are ahead. They look after the house too. Here it's too much freedom. There when we were little we were told not to do certain things because we were girls. Here you see kids, girls, at 2 or 4 o'clock at night in the streets. This is more freedom than is necessary. In India there is the right amount of freedom (#6, first-generation woman, age 39, arrived at the age of 23).

In contrast, one second-generation respondent thought that women in India are more oppressed than women in the Euro-Canadian society:

Well, from the media women don't really have a good life, and it's not just from the media, I know in parts . . . (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

In the second type of responses respondents discussed women's roles in India from a cultural perspective. Respondents said that culturally women in India are the base of the house and everything depends upon them. The respondents said those roles are good if the woman does not work outside the house. Women who are primarily homemakers feel good about the fact that everybody in the house depends upon them. Such women derive a great amount of mental satisfaction from thinking that their house would not run without them. However, for women who are working outside the house it becomes very hard to handle both the house work and the outside work.

Other respondents discussed women's roles as they perceive them to currently

be in India. Respondents said that there are no specific roles for women in India and that there is not much difference between men's and women's roles. These respondents said that women's roles in India have gone through a change. Whereas previously they used to give values to the children and looked after the household only, nowadays they are becoming professionals too. Respondents said that nowadays everything is considered important by women. Some of the respondents said that they do not see any set roles for women in India because women in India are taking up all kinds of roles.

Everything is important. Previously . . . like my mother never worked outside. Nowadays maybe inflation or people are going more after different standards, T.V., cars etc. so everybody has to work (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27):

Now they are starting to have more of outside influences as well, like you know they are working outside and they do have financial stability. They are starting to provide for their households whereas it used to be . . . whereas the woman was just the caregiver at home. In a lot of cases that's still true but they are also working outside the home (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

In contrast, one second-generation woman (the above respondent's sister) thought that women in India have a very small role:

A very small role. Where I came from it was like you were nothing. You were there just for cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children. That's what they were raised to do from the beginning and that's what you are (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

It is interesting to note that while these sisters share a common class background this does not appear to be influential in terms of their perceptions as their responses are contradictory.

Other respondents said that even though women's roles have changed, they have not given up their previous roles. Respondents said that although they go to work in the morning and come back in the evening they still have to be the caregivers the rest of the time.

It's not like they have given up that responsibility. They just have added on more responsibility (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

When asked, "Have these roles changed for you?" most of the first-generation respondents said that the roles have changed in the sense that whereas back home they had servants to do the housework such as cooking and cleaning here they have to do everything themselves. Others said that they have changed somewhat because they are doing some things here that they would not be doing in their country of birth.

Like I started working but still I came home, I had to do the housework too like clean and then cook and everything, yeah, so . . . whereas, back home we had a servant to do the cleaning (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

There are a lot of things that you do more than what you would have thought of doing. For example, right now we are painting our house and I would have never thought of painting the house if I was in Tanzania. Like I wouldn't even think of doing it (#12, first-generation woman, age 34, arrived at the age of 28).

Some of the respondents said that their roles are almost the same as they were in India and have not changed that much.

Not that much. Because whatever I was doing there I'm doing here except in some things. Like my husband is helping me about the cleaning and vacuuming and all that but he doesn't cook here either. And if I tell him I don't feel like cooking he will order a pizza (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

Some of the second-generation women said that roles have changed for them

and others said that because they don't see set roles for women in India, they can't say whether their roles have changed or not.

Oh yes, definitely. Like you know, I don't do just cooking, cleaning or whatever. I do have my work. I do have places to go. I do have a little bit of freedom to go where I want (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

I think because I don't really see a set role, so a woman in India because there has been so much change lately, I don't really see a set role for myself right now as a South Asian Canadian (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

They have changed somewhat. I know because we don't have the extended family here you know. I wouldn't be taking care of my mother-in-law and my father-in-law and then whoever is in his family (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

When asked how women's roles in India compare to women's roles in Euro-Canadian society there were again several types of responses. Some of the respondents discussed women's participation in politics as an example. Respondents said that in politics Indian women are ahead of Euro-Canadian women. Some of the other respondents said that they see no difference between roles of women in India and roles of women in Euro-Canadian society. One respondent said that it is not possible to compare women's roles in the two societies because they are two completely different cultures and a few of the other respondents said that women's roles are completely different in the two societies.

For example, we had a woman Prime Minister. But here in Canada they try their best to see that a woman is not given the chance to become the Prime Minister. In politics they [men] don't let them come forward (#6, first-generation woman, age 39, arrived at the age of 23).

By nature women's roles all over the world are the same. The white women that I know of also have to care for the house. In earlier times too they used to be

mostly housewives. They had to do all the household chores whereas men would do the outside [work] (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Roles are the same for all women. Because in my case maybe I'm working outside home so . . . and all my Canadian [Euro-Canadian] friends [are working]. And they are in the same boat as I am. So we all come home and we do the same thing like back home (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27).

I don't know but I think you can't compare but over here men they help women in cooking in supper etc. But on the other hand, back home we have lots of part time servants who come and help so men don't really bother. So I don't know how to compare, it's totally a different culture (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

They are totally different. Um here they will divide each and every duty to each and every individual. Like she will give some work to the husband, some work to the kids. But we don't. In India they usually don't divide the duties. The woman will work as hard as she can. She will do all the household jobs. She wouldn't . . . like Indian woman usually cannot take time out for herself. Here they . . . women prefer to take time out even for themselves. That's the first thing. We usually think of others first. Then we will think of ourselves. But here they will think of themselves first. That's the good thing (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

One second-generation respondent said that it's not that women's roles in Euro-Canadian society in Canada are completely different, but they are different in the sense that women in Euro-Canadian society have put a lot of limitations on those roles. The respondent gave the example of the role of a woman as a mother and said that while the role exists in both cultures, it is not the same in the Euro-Canadian society. The respondent said that the difference lies in the fact that a mother in the Euro-Canadian society expects her children to move out of the house when they are 16 or 17 and frees herself of that role. Whereas in India, because children are not expected to move out of the house at an immature age and can live in the parental house even as adults the

role of mother never comes to an end. "A mother in India remains a mother for life" said the respondent beaming.

Another difference was discussed in terms of perceptions towards marriage. One second-generation respondent said that the difference lies in the fact that women in India expect to be married by a certain age, whereas in Euro-Canadian society marriage usually is not a priority. The respondent discussed her visit to her extended family in India and said that women her age in her extended family in India were happily discussing things like who is going to be next in line for marriage. Most of the second-generation respondents were careful not to generalize and insisted that roles depended on the individual and where one lives in India. Respondents discussed differences with respect to rural and urban India as well as bigger and smaller cities. They also discussed the difference with regard to the traditional roles of women and more contemporary roles of women:

Again it depends on the woman. Um there's quite a few strong women you know. We have women in power, we have women . . . and then there are more traditional roles, but I think India is held together just because they have strong women. Because we have women from social work that do a lot of work with the family planning and all that and we have women doctors, we have women . . . you name it. We have women in almost every field and you know it's such a population . . . And I think women . . . the traditional role was women stay at home and do . . . but nowadays it's different I think. It's you know women have got banking jobs, women do a lot of . . . (#15, second-generation woman, age 27, arrived at the age of 5).

When asked, "Do you think women should participate in public places such as politics?" all of the respondents agreed that they should.

Because everyone has their own ideas. And if only men are being in those positions it'll be only their ideas. But it's for everyone. Like all those ideas those



positions are for both. So I think I like women to be in that too. So they will express, well, what we want and what we need. Women know better what we need and they are smart people (#5, first-generation woman, age 22, arrived at the age of 16).

Yes, I think so. Definitely. I think there are a lot of old boys and boys clubs that, um even on committees at the universities you see the old generation - this is women in general not specifically South Asian women - um they should participate more because I think it's also a role model thing for the younger women. For instance, what they have done I'm thinking of specifically . . . I'm in biology, and out of the thirty professors in biology, there's only one female professor. And we talk a lot about women's issues, she also discusses, she also teaches women's studies and even it's not just South Asian women, even Canadian women, they don't see, I mean there aren't that many professors that are women in science, maybe just in Thunder Bay, I don't know about other places, maybe they don't see that as something that they would even want to pursue. And she said that she had a lot of discussions with women and they were actually fighting her with it. They are saying that "well, why should we even want to do this, it's not that we can't or anything" but given the option of seeing a role model I think makes a difference. So I think they should participate (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

When asked, "What are the appropriate roles for women in your opinion?" all of the respondents agreed that there are no appropriate roles for women. Respondents said that there should not be any difference between men and women and that women themselves should be allowed to define what roles are appropriate and what roles are not appropriate.

Appropriate roles [laughing]? Um I don't know if there's any appropriate roles because I mean I don't think . . . this is a personal thing, I just don't think they should be running off and doing whatever they want. There should be some sort of stability and discipline but I think it's individual. I think the person has to decide for themselves, um what their role should be (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

It is interesting to note that even when some of the respondents started talking about what they think the appropriate roles for women are, halfway through they ended

up disagreeing with themselves. With all of these respondents it came down to the argument that they don't think there are any appropriate roles for women other than what the women themselves define to be appropriate.

To be a good mother first. So that children will be the best. If she takes good care of the children they will be the best and secondly, as a good wife. Actually, a good person. Actually, that depends on the person. If I want to be a good politician then I can be. But it depends upon me. No one will force me to be that thing. Like it comes from inside. So the appropriate roles, she can be anything. But the thing should come out from inside (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

I don't think we can draw a line because I have seen in Asian families men are good shoppers. They do good shopping. As for our house I like to go shopping. So there. I don't think we can draw a line that this is good for women. I think women are more patient than men. But then I have seen families where men are more patient than women. I think it depends on the individual. I think if men are man of the house, going for job women should help and if she is going out then other person should do it. It should be equally divided. Not equally, whatever. You can't draw a line. It's kind of interlinked things (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

The discussion of women's roles illuminates the flexibility and fluidity of identity which comes through the lack of consensus as to what it is to be an Indian woman. While most of the second-generation women's discussions reflected similar ideas on women's roles in India as the first-generation women some of the second-generation women's discussions suggested some contradictions. While the contradictions point towards the flexibility and fluidity of identity, the discussion which follows brings out the complex nature of the sub-continent of India.

When asked what she thinks women's roles in India are like, one second-generation respondent said that from the media she finds that there is a lot of misconception about women's roles in India. Right after that the respondent

contradicted herself and said that she knows in parts that women in India do not have a good life.

Well, from the media, women don't really have a good life, and it's not just from the media, I know in parts . . . ( So you feel there's a mixture?) I'm sure that there's a mixture but we just don't hear about the mixture. I think it's sensationalized. The oppression of women is sensationalized. It is sensationalised and it's bad, but the facts are that Indian women are more oppressed, or face more different types of oppression than women perhaps from other cultures (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

When I asked her if she feels there is a mixture, the respondent started criticizing the media for sensationalizing the oppression of women, and considered it a bad thing on the part of the media, but then again ended up agreeing with the media portrayals and said that women are more oppressed. Then she corrected herself again, and said that Indian women face more different types of oppression than women from other cultures. I asked the respondent if she could give some examples of the oppression that Indian women face:

Well, just gender roles, education isn't valued as much as motherhood for instance, or family life is. Being a very accommodating and loyal wife is valued a lot more than doing some good for the community for instance. (Do you think these things are not valued in the mainstream society?) I think that they are valued by the mainstream but probably not as much strength is put on them. You can have a career and you can have a family. It's not really a moral dilemma. Whereas, for the Indian women who have been raised here you have a lot of support. But if you are an Indian woman in India, I think it becomes a moral dilemma to have a family or a career.

Here again the respondent said that gender roles are different and gives examples of an accommodating and loyal wife being valued more than doing some good for the community. She compared that with Euro-Canadian society in Canada and said that even in that society these roles are valued, but probably they are not

stressed as much. Then the respondent compared Indian women raised in India and Indian women raised in Canada and said that the ones that have been raised in Canada get a lot of support compared to the ones raised in India. I asked the respondent if she thinks that these roles have changed for her after coming to Canada, and she again made a statement contradicting her earlier one.

I think my perceptions of them have changed. I was young when I was in India, but I think I was there long enough to sort of pick up on the values and the gender roles, what I was expected, the expectations, and my father isn't stereotypical at all. So I remember thinking I can't be doing this because I shouldn't be doing this because I am a girl. And then my father would say or do something that would be conflicting with that which made it clear that he didn't have any expectations of girls do this and boys do that.

Earlier she said that Indian women who are raised here get more support than Indian women raised in India. But here she said that when she was in India, her father, who she says is "not stereotypical at all," never expected her to do something or not do something because of her being a girl. I asked the respondent how women's roles compare to their roles in Euro-Canadian society. Here again she makes statements that are contradictory to her previous statements:

It really depends on your family, depends on who the people are around you because I know that there's women in my family in India who are . . . they are not oppressed. They have very loving, supportive families. And it's a great experience, I mean from what I can see and what I know, but I know of other Indian women . . . It's so hard to generalize. (What is the impression you get from your own experience in India?) In my family, from what I saw, I was there almost three years ago, like I told you, I thought everything was fine. It was a little bit of a shock because I was expecting a lot more oppression, I really was. But I didn't see it. I was expecting to see a lot worse but within people that I met you know, friends and family that we had, I didn't see much. In fact, of the people that we met that were our age I thought that they were, the women that I met who were my age, my sister's age, I was shocked that how, I want to say modern, but that's not really the way it works, how unconventional they were,

you know what I mean? Like they have this image of Indian women being in a particular way and they weren't. We were kind of joking on about it later saying that we were more 'Indian' than some of these people and it was fine. It was an awakening experience (#4, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 8).

So here again the respondent is contradicting herself when she says that it really depends on the family and that women in her extended family in India are not oppressed at all and that they have very loving and supportive families. The respondent also talked about how she was shocked to see women in her family in India being different from what she had believed them to be: "It was a little bit of a shock because I was expecting a lot more oppression, I really was. But I didn't see it." In the end, the respondent makes another contradictory statement that she was "kind of joking on about it later saying that we were more 'Indian' than some of these people." I asked the respondent if the roles of Indian women in India are completely different from the roles of women in the dominant European society in Canada:

Um I don't think they are completely different roles, I think probably there's um some things are considered more important. Maybe the degree is different. But I didn't see it as a . . . I didn't see it as completely black and white. There were some differences and then again it depends on the family.

Contradiction is again evident in the respondent's statement. Earlier the respondent had said that Indian women are more oppressed, and gave the example of motherhood, and accommodating wife being valued more than doing some good for the community, but later on she says that she did not see it as completely black and white, and that there were some differences but it again depends on the family.

In another interview, initially the respondent described women's roles in India in

terms of cooking, cleaning, and raising the children.

A very small role. Where I came from it was like you were nothing. You were there just for cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children. That's what they were raised to do from the beginning and that's what you are. That's what I saw anyway when I went back home (#14, second-generation woman, age 24, arrived at the age of 12).

(Have these roles changed for you?) Oh yes, definitely. Like you know I don't do just cooking, cleaning or whatever. I do have my work. I do have places to go. (How do women's roles compare?) Different. Like I told you to feel nothing in India to have no opinion in India. That's what it was.

As can be noted, here the respondent feels that women have no opinion in India, but right after that when talking about whether women should participate in public places she made another statement contradicting her first statement:

There are a lot of like political . . . not here anyway, Indian or whatever, they have leadership. They are leaders of this community, that community. Why shouldn't women have that kind of life? Why should only men?

As noted above, earlier, when discussing women's roles in India, the respondent made no mention of Indian women's participation in politics, and discussed their roles only in terms of cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children, but here she made note of that, and even made a slight comparison with women in Euro-Canadian society.

As mentioned above, the contradictions point towards the flexibility of identity by showing that India is a complex place, and that there is no monolithic experience for women in India.

#### **4.3 RAISING CHILDREN**

Respondents were asked if the way they have raised or, are raising their children is different from, or similar to, the way children are raised in the Euro-Canadian

society. The discussion that followed in answer to this question points toward the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'." This identity formation becomes evident in respondents' awareness of the attitudes and perspectives of the dominant society and their ability to both maintain a connection to their own values despite those attitudes and to express their own perspective on the dominant society's culture. Most of the first-generation respondents said that they are raising or have raised their children different from the way children are raised in Euro-Canadian society. Respondents discussed the differences<sup>1</sup> with respect to things such as, family values, and marital values. Some of the other differences respondents discussed were, dating, stress on sex, value of education, stress on earning money, premarital sex, emphasis on "mine" and "yours," and the practice of paying children for doing chores around the house.

Over here they have premarital sex and stuff like that which is not good according to us and I'm told that this is the only gift you can give to each other. The rest is material things, doesn't count. (I'm sorry, what gift?) Your virginity. And of course goes for both boys and girls. This is how we are raising our kids (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

Most of the respondents said that there is too much stress on sex in Euro-Canadian society. Respondents gave examples of children's skipping songs, children's clapping games, and children's other games that according to them right from the beginning teach children about sex and sexual relationships between boys and girls in very subtle ways. Respondents also discussed the emphasis placed on finding a

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<sup>1</sup>. This is an area in which the class background of the participants maybe reflected in terms of their perceptions. Most of the participants come from the middle and upper middle class background.

boyfriend and girlfriend in the Euro-Canadian society at a very early age, which, according to them, is problematic. One respondent believes that too much stress on sex robs children of their innocence and gave an example of an incident that happened in her daughter's school which caused a great amount of stress to her daughter as well as to her.

Children here don't have their innocence because . . . maybe it's due to the way their parents live their life here. When [my daughter] was new to the class there was one child who told her something which really upset her a lot and she came and told me and I was shocked. So I talked to the teacher. She talked to the Mom of the child. The Mom apologized and she said she'll never again talk such things. At that point I was even ready to withdraw her from that school and change her school. But it's not the child's fault. It's what the child hears and sees (#7, first-generation woman, age 32, arrived at the age of 25).

Some of the respondents said that at a young age boys and girls become emotionally disturbed if something bad happens to them. Therefore, they are teaching their children to wait until they are mature enough to understand the significance of certain things. Respondents said that they feel that they have to take care of their children until the children can tell right from wrong. I asked the respondents if they could give me examples of how they are raising their children differently:

Like I have seen the parents, they will send the kids out. This is the smallest example. And they wouldn't see where they are, what they are doing. Like where is she or where is he? They don't look after them. They might get hurt. I have seen very young kids roaming out on the roads and a very fast car can hurt them. And we . . . like if the children are ours we have to take care of them ourselves. Not the neighbours. So that's the main thing. I have seen teenage girls roaming around very late in the night. That's not the age like that age is the age of fantasy. At that time the girls will think of themselves as heroines and the boys always think of themselves as heroes. But at that time we have to tell them, "See, this may happen. This can be." I don't want my daughter to be a teenage mother. For sure [in a very determined manner]. She should be a mother but at a certain age. Like when she understands how valuable it is to be



a mother. At that time. Not like going out and being a mother. She should understand the duties of motherhood. (Is that different in the Euro-Canadian society?) yeah. some parents are good here but some are not. Thirty five percent and seventy five percent.

One of the other differences (as they perceive it) respondents discussed was that Euro-Canadian parents do not support their children all the way through and expect them to stand on their own feet too early in life. Respondents said that even Indo-Canadian parents teach their children to stand on their own feet, however, the difference is that parents also support their children as much as they can.

Respondents said that unlike Euro-Canadian parents, Indian parents in India and in Canada do not expect, or teach their children to leave school and start earning money at a young age. Respondents said that in the Euro-Canadian families children have to grow up by themselves "step by step." Some of the respondents gave examples of their children's friends, or their own friends in the case of second-generation respondents, who have to meet their own tuition fees. This attitude, according to respondents, causes a lot of problems for the children and as a result, they have a lot of difficulty standing on their feet. One respondent said that if the parents with Asian background have not given up their values after coming to Canada they will always support and care for their children no matter what age the children are.

I can say about Asians that if they are still keeping their values that their parents give up everything to feed and educate their kids. They don't say that when you are sixteen you have to go out and do your own thing. It doesn't matter if they are sixteen or they are unmarried. Even when they are married they can stay with their parents.

The emphasis on individuality as expressed through "mine" and "yours" was

another major difference as discussed by a majority of the respondents. Most of the respondents said that in the Euro-Canadian society there is too much emphasis on "mine" and "yours." Whereas, in contrast, in the Indo-Canadian families, "ours" is emphasized.

Their lives are centred around the concept of "mine." "My" room, "my" clothes. In India it's always "ours" - "our" house, "our" everything. There is too much emphasis on "my" in the Euro-Canadian society (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

Related to the concept of "mine" and "yours" was the practice of paying children for doing chores around the house. Respondents regarded the practice as problematic in that it teaches children to become materialistic. Respondents said that they are not teaching their children to become like that.

I have not raised them like that from the beginning that you do this and I'll pay you money. This house is ours, it belongs to us all and we have to do everything together (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

Some of the respondents gave examples of Euro-Canadian children going on paper routes and said that although it makes children independent, it also makes it easy for them to follow the wrong path. One respondent compared the media coverage of child labour in India to the Euro Canadian society's practice of sending young kids on paper routes and other jobs.

One thing is good here that from the beginning the child is taught to be self dependent. For example, at a very young age they are sent on paper routes. So they are taught to earn their own expenditures. But sometimes it has a bad effect too. Kids when kids earn money at a very young age it also happens that it starts them on the wrong path, for example, going to clubs, smoking, drinking, drugs etc. (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45).

There [in India] sometimes it happens that the man of the family dies and then children and the mother all have to work. So from here a kid went to India from here. They had sent him to India and he made a lot of rattle on T.V. that small children work there and the government doesn't do anything. I would like to ask them, here parents send their little kids 5, 6 year old kids on paper routes even when it's subzero or when the kid is 10 or 11 they send them on other jobs then what is it? If it's not child labour then what is it? (#16, first-generation woman, age 47, arrived at the age of 23).

As can be noted, this respondent does not see any difference between child labour in India and the Euro-Canadian children earning money from things such as going on paper routes. The example can again be related to the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" which is evident in this respondent's way of subverting, challenging, and resisting the dominant ideologies and the stereotypes of her culture.

Some of the respondents also discussed the difference with regard to the role of the elderly in the family.

You can't take it for granted that the grandparents will look after their grand kids from their daughter or their son. But in India it's a tradition that it's parents' duty to help raise their kids' kids. You don't have to ask them or . . . and also there are no classes for this. Babysitter courses etc. There's nothing like that. so that's the advantage of joint family. Parents don't have to worry about their kids. Here I guess it must be hard for them. Because you have to do everything yourself be it raising the kids, or going on a job, or looking after the house. So kids don't get any love. They stay with the baby sitter like a machine whereas grandparents raise their grand kids with love. And that kid wouldn't forget the love he or she gets after growing up. So in India grandparents don't smoke cigarettes or anything like that but here baby sitters could be doing all of those things and they also call their boyfriends over. I have seen it. It has a very bad influence on the kid. That's why here kids learn about all these things at a very young age. Our kids sometimes know everything after marriage (#8, first-generation woman, age 52, arrived at the age of 45)).

When asked, "Do you think daughters and sons should be raised differently?"

the discussion that followed again pointed towards the flexibility and fluidity of identity which became evident in respondents' different opinions on this topic. Some of the respondents said that they should not be raised differently and others said that they should be raised differently in some ways. A few of the respondents said that even when parents do not intend to raise sons and daughters differently, it just happens that way. These discussions again point towards flexibility of identity which becomes evident in difference of opinion on this topic.

Those respondents who believed that they should not be raised differently, said that there was a time when boys were considered to be the breadwinners of the family and therefore they were raised with that mentality. In those days, according to the respondents, it made sense to raise them differently. Since it's not like that any more, according to the respondents, boys and girls should not be raised differently. One respondent gave the example of India and said that there was a time when parents used to give the whole property to their sons because sons were expected to take care of the parents, and daughters were given their share in the form of dowry because they had to go away. But nowadays, since boys are not taking up their family professions they end up going away too. Besides that, according to the respondent, nowadays, parents put up a lot of money in raising their daughters and educating them, therefore, they should not be raised differently.

Because they [daughters] had to go away and sons used to look after the parents. But nowadays girls are . . . they have to educate them and then they are . . . boys are not taking their families' professions. If the father is a doctor they are not necessarily . . . the sons would not necessarily become a doctor. So they have to go away. So they will have their individual family. So why raise

the girl and the boy differently?

Those respondents who believed that daughters should be raised differently in some ways said that because of biological differences girls should be told about certain things, but in other things there should be no difference.

Well they are different physically. So there should be some difference. Like girls should be told about certain things. But otherwise, beyond the physical, as far as ideas are concerned, I think they should be raised in the same way (#6, first-generation woman, age 39, arrived at the age of 23).

No, because they are the same. In some ways I like the daughter to be a little different from the boy. My boy goes out, one until twelve o'clock. I find I'm not worried. I'm worried, he's my son but I'm not worried too much. But if my daughter stays out until twelve o'clock I'll be more worried than my boy because she is a girl. I don't want something to happen to her. Boys protect themselves and they realize what's right what's wrong. Girls realize too. But that's our custom. Our culture is a little bit different (#, first-generation woman, age 49, arrived at the age of 30).

Other respondents said that boys and girls just happen to be raised differently even when parents do not intend to.

No [chuckling], I don't think so. I have seen . . . well, I can say now that they shouldn't be but I don't know. I mean if I have children, if I have a boy and a girl I don't know if I am going to react the same way and treat them exactly the same way, because, I think just picturing in my mind now I think I'll be a bit more upset if my daughter has been out until two o'clock in the morning [laughing]. I mean I don't want to admit it but I'm being honest. They shouldn't be, but I think it happens that they are (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

When asked if it is different in the Euro-Canadian society, most of the first-generation respondents said that they do not see any difference between the way sons and daughters are raised in the Euro-Canadian society. Most of the second-generation respondents, however, said that differences do exist in the Euro-Canadian society too. Second-generation respondents discussed distinctive gender roles in the Euro-

Canadian society and said that they may be different from the Indian gender roles, but they do exist. Respondents gave examples of their Euro-Canadian friends who are not allowed to do certain things because they are women. One respondent gave examples of pink diapers for girls and blue diapers for boys to show that gender roles exist in Euro-Canadian society. Another respondent gave the example of her friend who she said is treated different from her brother.

Um no. My friend's, her parents are Finnish and German and they are parents I mean they were brought up in Canada but they are descendants from Germany and Finland and she fought and she fought with her brother because they were always allowed to do things that she wasn't allowed to do and even now, she is a year older than I am and when her brother wants to go downtown and her Dad will joke about him drinking and doing whatever, hanging out with his friends but if she wants to even go there then there is a big issue and she is not allowed to do it. And she always has always got to help her Mom with the dishes but her brothers don't have to. She can go out, they don't have a problem with her shovelling the driveway or mowing the lawn, but the boys will never wash the dishes. So there are gender biases I think (#3, second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada).

First-generation respondents were asked, "What expectations do you have of your children?" and second-generation respondents were asked, "What expectations do you think your parents have of you?" A frequently cited response was "good education." Other responses include, professional career, and marriage.

Well I believe whatever . . . God knows but we have done our duty. We have taught them well. (What do you hope them to accomplish in life?) The only hope we have is for them to get good education and then get married and settle down. And if they don't want to get married that's their choice but I would like them to get married (#2, first-generation woman, age 48, arrived at the age of 27).

I don't mind my girl studying anything or doing anything but I wish she will reach the extreme point . . . Like if she is a painter she'll be the best painter, or, she is the best dancer. I wish the best thing for her. She should go very deep in the

subject. That's what I want from her. Nothing else. And I wish she will understand all the things first and then she will jump into some matter of life. Like as I told you about the dating and stuff. She will think twice about the thing, the good part and the bad part. That she will understand the thing first and then go and do it (#9, first-generation woman, age 30, arrived at the age of 29).

Better education, um good living standard, money wise, job wise, security wise, and our rights wise too. They have proper rights you know, living in this country. Make sure they get all proper rights (#10, first-generation woman, age 49, arrived at the age of 30).

Basically at this point they will love to see me get married, have kids and give them the same values that they have enriched in us. Other than that they would like us to be successful career wise. Um they don't want us to be dependent upon anybody (#13, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

In the discussion about women's roles a diversity of opinions illuminated the flexible and fluid nature of identity. Some respondents discussed women's roles in India in terms of freedom, oppression, equality, inequality, and so on and made comparisons with Euro-Canadian society. Other respondents discussed women's roles in India from a cultural perspective and said that culturally women are the base of the house. Others discussed women's roles as they perceive them to be presently in India. These respondents said that there are no specific roles for women in India and that there is not much difference between men's and women's roles. When making comparisons with Euro-Canadian society respondents said that in politics women in India are ahead of women in the Euro-Canadian society. Some of the respondents said that women's roles in India and women's roles in Euro-Canadian society are the same because women everywhere have to care for the house. Others said that the roles are completely different. One respondent said that it is not possible to compare

women's roles in India and women's roles in the Euro-Canadian society because the two cultures are completely different. All of the respondents said that women should participate in public places because they can express what women need. All of the respondents said that there are no appropriate roles for women, and that a woman can be anything as long as she is the one making the decision. Some of the discussions brought out contradictory elements. The contradictions illuminated the flexibility and fluidity of identity and also illustrated the complexities of the sub-continent of India.



**CHAPTER FIVE - RACISM, OTHERING, STEREOTYPING AND  
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

**5.1 RACISM, OTHERING, AND STEREOTYPING IN RECENT YEARS**

As discussed previously, Indo-Canadian respondents showed their awareness of racism prevalent in Canada and many respondents gave examples of particular instances of racist events that they had experienced. The kinds of issues raised by the respondents are reinforced by a variety of studies on racism in Ontario, such as, Walter Pitman's report 'Now is not too late' (1977), which examines racist attitudes among the white population in Ontario as well as racism in Ontario schools. Of the several people interviewed who were involved in separate incidents of racism and racist violence "brown skinned people, almost all Indians, and the majority Sikhs, predominated among the victims" (1977:62). Pitman's (1977) report also discusses the impact of racism experienced by minority children. According to the report,

another by-product of the slurs, the beatings, and the "bugging", is the effect it has on the children in the victim minority group. The Task Force interviewer met a group of ten children whose parents came from India over twelve years ago and had "made it." These children had sought a very unfortunate means for developing self-identity. With hardly any sentiments in their minds for their home country, they had begun to hate India in order to become "good" Canadians. On racist attacks their verdict was simple and sharp: the East Indians who have come in the last three to four years are entirely responsible, because "they have no manners, they are dirty and they live in horrible places." The contempt the interviewer found in these children for India's poor stays unmatched in his memory with anything he had ever heard or read. Parents "economic" success in Toronto had meant for these children a complete denial of their past. The effect of this process on their future self-image may be devastating both in personal and societal terms (Pitman 1977:176).

The literature on immigrants of South Asian origin to Canada points out that

racism has been commonly experienced by these people. Because of the colour of their skin they have suffered from racist attitudes in the form of verbal abuse, vandalism against personal property, vandalism against Sikh gurdwaras, personal violence, harassment, discrimination in the job market, devaluation of educational degrees and so on (Buchignani and Indra 1985:215-17). Buchignani and Indra (1985) cite several real life incidents of racial violence, and discrimination.

On August 2nd, 1981, Khuspal Singh Gill, 21 years old, was beaten to death in Vancouver by four white youths. A witness in the courtroom reported that the attackers left after knocking Gill unconscious only to return later to further beat the body and clean the pockets. One of the murderers later proudly declared that "today, I've killed a hindu." (1985:217).

He came to Canada with B.S. and M.A. degrees from the university of Punjab. The Ontario Department of Education rated his B.S. as equivalent to Canadian Grade 13 and apparently overlooked his M.A. altogether. He unsuccessfully applied for over a hundred jobs in his occupation. The only work he could find was as a security guard. In 1971 he ended his life by jumping in front of a Toronto subway train (Buchignani and Indra 1985:211).

This racism is still prevalent in Canada even when South Asian Canadian men and women possess high qualifications and skills (Ramcharan 1984). Harish Jain (1984) discusses the requirement of credentials or educational qualifications from recognized institutions by which South Asian Canadians are discouraged in the employment sector. Often these requirements are higher than the actual requirements of the job and are not needed for the effective performance of the job (Jain 1984). Employers use the strategy of artificial job requirements to keep South Asian Canadians out of the job market (Kanungo 1984). Rabindra Kanungo discusses the problems that new immigrants from South Asia still have to face. According to him,

they are viewed as competitors in the Canadian economy and their presence is viewed as threatening to the well being of other Canadian nationals (Kanungo 1984).

Ratna Gosh (1983) discusses the combined effects of a multitude of difficulties on several levels that South Asian Canadian women have to face. According to her South Asian Canadian women face some difficulties that are similar to the ones faced by South Asian Canadian men because of the racist attitudes prevalent in the dominant Euro-Canadian society; some difficulties they have in common with immigrant women in particular; and some of the difficulties they face are specific to women of South Asian origin. The combined effect of all these problems, according to her, makes their situation very complex. Not only do they have to face sex segregation and low pay in the job market, but they also have to deal with the complex and subtle racism existing in the Canadian society (Gosh 1983).

As a consequence of these racist practices women of South Asian origin often find themselves in the lowest levels in the employment sector. Census data on Toronto 1981 shows that "16 percent of the visible-minority population have post-secondary degrees, diplomas or certificates compared to only 12 percent of the general population. However, they earn less and they are less likely to be employed in their chosen field" (quoted in Agnew 1996:126).

According to Himani Bannerji (1993), women of South Asian origin often have to work in factories that are situated in remote areas. This is similar to the experiences of non-English speaking women from European countries who have immigrated to Canada (See for example, Ng and Ramirez 1981; Dunk 1989). Bannerji also discusses

the irony in the term 'visible minority.' She points out that although known as 'visible minorities,' women of South Asian origin are hardly visible in the Canadian media and Canadian society. Their invisibility shows in their absence from those jobs, or work places which demand public contact. The peculiar situation of these women lies in the fact that although they are visually absent, they are very much present in the minds of the Euro-Canadian society in the form of stereotypes which portray them as 'passive,' 'docile,' 'unclean,' 'smelling of spices,' and so on (Bannerji 1993).

As was discussed in Chapter Three, most of my respondents had similar experiences. Respondents said that they had experienced racism in a variety of ways through issues of clothing, challenges about Indian marriages, stereotypes of 'arranged marriages,' and other aspects of their culture. Second-generation women reflected on their public school days and discussed the racism that they experienced. Some of the respondents discussed experiences with racism at work places. Structural racism in the form of devaluation of educational degrees was also discussed.

For instance, the university, you know, you have a degree from India. They [Indo-Canadians] have to go through them accepting your degree and evaluating it and sometimes not giving you admission. So it's very distressing. That shows how much value they place on Indian degrees (#7, first-generation woman, age 32, arrived at the age of 25).

Seth and Handa (1993), in their discussion, present the ways in which second-generation non-European people living in the hegemonic European derived culture in Canada are taught to deny their cultural heritage. Because of their experiences of growing up in a country where their culture is devalued they internalize the "dominant white Canadian racist discourse" and grow up with identities "based on shame"

(1993:76). Since they are considered outsiders in the country of their birth their reaction to racism is different from people who do not have to grow up in it. They often have to dissociate and depersonalize themselves to be able to live in this European dominated country. The result of this dissociation is the "mind/body split" by which they, on the one hand, become overconscious of their physical appearance and on the other hand, try to deny it by various methods such as adopting dominant society's behaviours and practices (Seth and Handa 1993:75). Second-generation Indo-Canadian respondents had similar experiences with racism where they internalized the racism and tried to hide from and deny their culture.

According to Buchignani and Indra (1985) racial thinking has played an important part in Canada not only in terms of Canada's immigration policies and treatment of Native people but also in ethnic stereotypes. They maintain that biological criteria have always been present in the evaluations of ethnic cultures, and stereotypes of ethnic groups, as well as setting up immigration policies. How different cultures are perceived goes hand in hand with the perceived biological differences between the minority group and the dominant society. Perceived biological and cultural similarity continues to be the criteria of how the dominant society in Canada evaluates non-European people (Buchignani and Indra 1985). Discussing the part played by the mass media, literature, and education in reproducing the stereotypical impressions of India they point out that each of these mediums has played its part in producing and reproducing the negative images and stereotypical impressions of South Asia:

News of South Asia is almost exclusively of poverty, illiteracy, violence, flood,

political repression, and other human calamities. Few Canadians could become aware that, say, India is a major industrial nation whose urban population is seven times greater than all Canadians together. Combined with literature and educational images that stress exotic culture and agriculturally based traditionalism, the overall effect is quite negative. Together they have made Canadians see South Asian immigrants as far more foreign and unusual than otherwise would be so (Buchignani and Indra 1985:208).

Radhika Parameswaran (1996) writes about the phenomenon of 'othering' which is a practice by which members of the dominant society can distance their experiences from the experiences of 'third world women' by seeing them as more oppressed than themselves. Within this context 'third world women' are seen as belonging to a more backward culture and the western world and its cultures are seen as progressive. This same distancing, according to her, can also be seen within the western media discourse in which Indian women are portrayed as victims of male violence and Indian culture is seen as a culture "that only oppresses women" (1996:70). Within this context violence is seen as a "natural and inevitable consequence of oppression stemming from Indian culture and tradition" (Parameswaran 1996:70). By focusing on the oppression of women as a universal practice in the Indian culture the western media objectifies Indian women. Research on the print media in the United States shows that some commonly found themes in print media are "India as over-populated and impoverished, India as exotic and primitive, and India as a land of turmoil" (Parameswaran 1996:71). Words such as "primal violence, "born in blood" are often used to dramatize and sensationalize violence in India (Parameswaran 1996:71). The importance of the media in shaping people's perceptions can be seen from some of the terms, such as, "spicy," "curry," "yoga," "snake charmers," that have come to stand for

India in popular western discourse (Parameswaran 1996:77). Furthermore, words such as "'traditional,' 'ancient,' 'custom,' and 'culture'" are often used in the media to describe practices and events in non-western societies depicting these societies as "static, tribal societies untouched by time" (Parameswaran 1996, endnote 51).

Geeta Patel proposes a strategy to the readers of print media to "reverse the gaze" by applying the same generalizations that categorize 'other' people and come between the reader's understanding and the subject of discussion to themselves (Parameswaran 1996). For example, a paragraph examined by her from "The New York Times" can be changed in the following way: The paragraph from "The New York Times" reads, "In India's system of arranged marriages, the bride is often regarded as a source of dowry income and in some cases little more than a servant in her husband's family home" (Patel, quoted in Parameswaran 1996:90). By imagining that the paragraph is a story about the United States in the Indian media the same paragraph can be changed as follows: "In the U.S. system of marriages, the bride is often regarded as a source of income and is in some cases little more than a servant in her husband's home" (quoted in Parameswaran 1996:90)

Vijay Agnew (1993) discusses similar negative images and stereotypes of women of South Asian origin. According to her, the focus of most articles in popular media coverage portray women of South Asian origin as 'traditional,' 'passive,' 'illiterates,' 'poor,' and as 'victims' of their own 'sexist' culture (1993:147). Agnew also discusses the media portrayal of 'arranged marriage' which, according to her is often described in "'Canadian' terms" using "vulgar North American reference point" (Agnew

1993:147). According to her, titles, subtitles, and descriptions of 'arranged marriages' used in the articles in the print media serve to stereotype the culture, show disregard of the meaning of and reasons behind South Asian customs, render South Asian customs insignificant and imply that the custom of 'arranged marriage' "is both different and inferior" (Agnew 1993:147).

As previously discussed in Chapter Three, several of the respondents were aware of images of India as poor, exotic and so on. Second-generation women resented the media representations of South Asian Canadian women as exotic and said that these women's experiences are usually presented either as 'exotic,' or as 'oppressed.' First-generation women discussed the overwhelming media portrayals of India as a 'poor' and 'filthy' country.

As discussed previously, the reason many minority people adopt the dominant society's cultural practices is not necessarily because they like the dominant cultural practices. It maybe a strategy of dealing with racism, stereotyping, othering and the negative way in which the minority cultural practices are looked at by the dominant society. For example, the reason minority people wear European derived cultural clothing in Canada is not necessarily because they prefer those to their own but rather it depends on how much acceptance they find for their own clothing in the dominant society. Interviews pointed out that it is the fear of being looked at 'differently' that motivates people to accept European derived clothing as 'Canadian' clothing. The choice to wear the dominant society's clothing instead of their own maybe one of the many forms of strategic functioning which helps people in the politics of everyday life.



According to Wilson(1973),

Minority-group members may feel compelled to comply with the dominant group's norms, not because they identify with or have internalized these norms, but because they lack sufficient resources to openly challenge them (Wilson, quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993:135).

Buchignani and Indra (1985) make a similar argument when they discuss post-war Sikh immigrants to Canada.

[A] majority of post-war Sikh immigrant men had decided not to continue the observance of wearing the Kakkas, the overt symbols of Sikh religion. This they did with reluctance, in the belief that to do so would allow them to fit better into the Canadian society. Following the lead of their second-generation compatriots they cut their hair, shaved their beards, and put aside the turban. This was a difficult and contentious choice (Buchignani and Indra 1985).

As they explain, Sikhs of that period did this not because they wanted to, but because they were aware of how these symbols are perceived by the dominant Euro-Canadian society.

The problem of whether to wear the Kakkas (especially the beard) is one which has wide implications for the unity, and perhaps even the survival of the Sikh community. Many men coming from India shave their beards and put aside their turbans with mixed feelings. They do it to 'look like other people', for they feel self-conscious with what to most Canadians is a strange and perhaps disquieting dress. At the same time, they feel at least temporarily that they have abandoned part of their heritage (Quoted in Buchignani and Indra 1985:108).

According to Buchignani and Indra (1985), issues of race and ethnic relations are not necessarily the result of two groups interacting with each other. On the contrary, sometimes, before even they come into contact with each other such groups already have ideas and images about cultures and races sometimes in the form of well developed stereotypes. These become even more problematic when one group has been able to shape the country's social and cultural structure in its own image as

people of European origin have been able to do in Canada. By establishing hegemony over the country's social, cultural, and economic institutions they have been able to associate their own values, and their own ideas about ethnicity and race into the country as a whole (Buchignani and Indra 1985:206). This is the reason that political and economic histories of Canada speak only about people of European origin and ignore the contributions made by non-European people (Dharuvarajan 1991). Along with their economic contributions non-European people's traditions and values in Canadian development have also been ignored and devalued. Some of the Indo-Canadian respondents discussed having to face questions such as, "You are here. You are Canadian. You should be dressing like Canadians. You should be talking like Canadians" (#13, second-generation woman). The assumption underlying such statements is that there is some consensus of what it is to be 'Canadian,' and that definition has nothing to do with any ethnic tradition. When Euro-Canadian people make such comments they forget that what they think to be 'Canadian' is also a European derived behaviour.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) examine similar statements when they discuss how "a society gives voice to racism and how forms of discourse institute, solidify, change, create and reproduce social formations" (1992:3). According to them, ideologies, practices, arguments, and so on are the things upon which the common sense of a particular society is based. These make up the taken-for-granted in a society and also define it and its culture. They define what is to be considered legitimate and what is not. It is in this fashion that the dominant ideologies of people of European origin have

been able to define what it is to be a 'Canadian.' However, ignored is the fact that the definition of 'Canadian' is itself a tradition which is not 'Canadian' in the traditional sense. The definition of 'normal identity' in Canada is itself an accumulation and/or transformation of another tradition. The culture that is considered 'Canadian' is actually a European derived culture. While examining and interpreting their interviews with 'white' British New Zealanders Wetherell and Potter (1992) show that to New Zealanders of British origin the definition of what it is to be a 'New Zealander' is very much their own ethnocentric idea. Although British New Zealanders discuss themselves and their society as open minded, and open to all kinds of differences, yet, at the same time they voice strong ideas about what 'real' New Zealanders are like. Obviously, the definition of 'real New Zealander' is again a very British-origin kind of ideal. Thus, underlying questions such as, "Why don't you behave like a Canadian?" is in fact an ethnic and racial kind of idea about what appropriate behaviour is.

A similar argument is put forth by Ruth Frankenberg (1993) in her discussion of the identity of 'whiteness' among a group of middle class American women of European descent. It involves a similar kind of argument in the sense that when these women talk about mainstream they are talking about middle class people of European descent. Even though they do not use the term 'white' there is a very strong sense that their idea of 'normal' is how 'white' people are. There are a set of associated behaviours and styles of dress and everything that is assumed to go along with the notion of 'mainstream' which obviously leaves out a whole series of others (Frankenberg 1993).

Related to this topic is another question of importance worded by Carl James

(1995) as, "When does a person cease to be regarded as an immigrant?" (1995:193). As discussed previously, many Indo-Canadian respondents discussed how they are constantly constructed as immigrants. Respondents discussed constantly having to face situations where they are looked at as immigrants and not as 'Canadians.' Similar ideas are discussed by James (1995). He points out that minorities, particularly racial minorities, are "often constructed as immigrants" by the dominant society members in Canada (1995:193). According to him, this attitude on the part of the dominant society shows a lack of consideration of the fact that "in Canada, with the exception of Aboriginals all of our ethnic groups are immigrants, some more recent than others" (1995:194).

## **5.2 REPRESENTATIONS AND IDENTITY**

As was discussed in Chapter Three, most of respondents identified themselves in more than one way depending upon the context. Madhu Kishwar (1996) discusses a person's identity as multilayered. According to her, the multilayered nature of human identity can be seen in many aspects of identity. For example, people can identify with their gender, ethnicity, region, province, relationship to the family, and so on all at the same time. Most of the time people do not even think about this multilayered nature of identity and without any conscious thinking identify themselves depending on the context (Kishwar 1996:6).

Similar ideas are put forth by Buchignani and Indra (1985) in their discussion of the subjective meaning of the term 'South Asian.' They point out that the self-identity of people of South Asian origin is so situationally specific that most people would feel

**South Asian only when interacting with non-South Asians.**

**An individual will only feel South Asian when interacting with non-South Asians. In interaction with Pakistanis, he or she will be Indian; with Gujaratis he or she will be Punjabi, with Punjabi Hindus he or she will be Sikh. Among other Sikhs he or she would be a Jat from a good family in Patiala. Being "South Asian" to most people from South Asia is only relevant when they leave the area (Buchignani and Indra 1985:124).**

**Vijay Agnew (1996) presents a similar picture when she points out that the category 'South Asian women' is on the one hand useful as it provides a strong base for unity and empowers women to resist all kinds of racist discrimination, but on the other hand, it does not recognize differences among them. As she points out, South Asian women come from many places, countries, religions, cultures, and even generations. "They may be first-generation immigrants from their country of origin, daughters of immigrants to Britain, or granddaughters of immigrants to Africa or the Caribbean" (Agnew, 1996:24). Similar examples were given by the Indo-Canadian respondents. The contextualness of identity became evident when respondents identified themselves in relation to either their province and the country of birth; or, the province, country of birth as well as the country of home; or, religion and the country of home; or, religion and the country of birth; and lastly, religion and the country of origin. These examples point out that people's identities actually depend on the context or the situation.**

**According to Buchignani and Indra, the commonality in the lives of South Asian Canadians exists only to the point of their experiences of racism and stereotyping. One result of this is what they refer to as a "made-in-Canada consciousness of being South**

Asian" (1985:122). People of South Asian origin might not even have thought about their identity as South Asians before coming to Canada. When applied by the dominant society this term is a culturally homogenous term for people of South Asian origin. People of South Asian origin, however, do not see themselves as that. Regional differences, linguistic differences, cultural variability, caste and class differences and religious differences make the identities of people of South Asian origin very situationally specific (Buchignani and Indra 1985:122).

I also noticed this aspect of identity while observing the Indo-Canadian community in informal settings. I became aware that the world of the Indo-Canadian community in Thunder Bay is by no means homogeneous but is characterized, sometimes, by regional cultures in conflict, or, by cultural jealousies and other times by feelings of 'togetherness.' One time, after attending a community function a comment was made by a member of the community, "They always keep Bhangra [Punjabi folk dance] first and not enough time is left for Dandia [Gujarati folk dance]."

The flexibility and fluidity of identity was very strongly present in my interviews in many other ways. It became evident when respondents showed a desire to not be restricted to any one culture and also when respondents discussed not facing any difficulty identifying with more than one cultures.

Flexibility of identity was also evident in respondents' discussions of women's roles in India which were described and discussed differently by them. According to Vijay Agnew (1990), ethnic identity is influenced by many factors such as family adjustment, gender role, the experience of finding employment, and the political

conditions under which one lives (1990:65). She observes that the conditions under which South Asian women construct their identity are "replete with images of the 'traditional,' 'unskilled' woman oppressed by her old culture" (1990:65). These images and stereotypes, according to her, are not supported by the women themselves:

Interviews with South Asian women, however, cast doubt on such popular and mistaken stereotypes. They suggest that ethnic identity and gender roles for South Asian women do not exist in some fixed and unchanging cultural codes but are constructed and reconstructed in the context of work, family, and social relationships (Agnew 1990:65).

Seth and Handa (1993) also present questions and debates among women of Indian origin about their status and their culture and how they feel about the role of women. Their discussion points towards an indistinct and vague notion of what it is to be an Indian woman. They point out that there is no one idea as to what it is to be an Indian or even what the Indian cultural values are. It points out that definitions of South Asian or Indian as understood in common discourse do not exist. There is no one way of being Indian or South Asian. Similar ideas come through in my interviews in the sense that Indo-Canadian respondents had different perspectives on these issues. It became evident that not all women of Indian origin have the same ideas around what gender roles are. The indistinct and vague notion of what it is to be an Indian woman shows that identity including gender identity is flexible and fluid and not rigid and it is actually racism which creates desire for a fixed identity (Bannerji 1993).

Madhu Kishwar (1996) points out that when people perceive some essential aspect of their identity as threatened they begin to assert it with all their strength. And if that aspect of the identity is necessary for the "personal, economic, or social well-

being" of the person then that person puts even more vigour into asserting that identity (1996:6). Similar ideas also came through in one interview where the respondent did not feel that there was room for any identity other than the Euro-Canadian identity to develop within the multicultural context of Canada. Therefore, the respondent decided to stay in India for a period of time with her children so that they could develop another identity.

As discussed earlier, in the literature, women are usually discussed under topics such as family, and "Family Level Adaptation" (Agnew 1996:101). Women's roles as active agents in the migration process, their contributions to the community, and their contributions to the survival of the family are often ignored. This type of inclusion and exclusion stereotypes women as "dependents who passively follow male immigrants to Canada and, once there, are confined to the home, family, and ethnic community" (Agnew 1996:101-2). This, however, is not how South Asian Canadian women perceive themselves. South Asian Canadian women consider themselves modern, well educated, and as equal to men (Agnew 1986). According to Agnew (1987), the Canadian South Asian female population has high levels of university education and also a greater participation in labour force (Agnew 1987). As discussed in Chapter Two and Three, similar ideas were presented by my respondents. In fact, while interacting with my community I observed that even when Indo-Canadian women do not have many educational qualifications they still consider themselves better than highly educated men in many ways. One time, after the interview, I got into an informal discussion with the respondent. The respondent said that just because she does not



work outside the house or just because she looks the way she does it does not mean that she is not smart:

I was very smart. But sometimes you have to behave in a different way, act in a different way. Just because he [her husband] has these degrees doesn't mean that he's smart. You wouldn't believe it but at our wedding out of his five sisters, all living in the same city where the wedding was taking place, none came to our wedding. He couldn't get along with any of them. He was so bad natured. I am the one who after getting married helped improve their relationship. When my father-in-law was sick I am the one who cared for him while his son went off to America. I am the one who went to India with my son for his marriage while he [her husband] stayed here. I am the one who went a few years ago to sell my house in India and disposed of other property making a lot of profit too while he stayed here and did nothing.

Sheila Ray (1992) discusses her experiences as a South Asian woman in Canada. She points out the various advantages including financial support, and moral courage that she got from her parents who she says possess a very proud heritage:

As is typical in Indian families, I have received tremendous financial support from my family for my education. This gave me a considerable advantage over my Canadian colleagues of other origins because it expanded my horizons and opened opportunities that would not have been available had I been worried about money. For example, I spent two summers in total immersion programs learning French. I also spent one summer at a French law school learning about Civil Law. If I had to spend my summers earning money like many average Canadian students I would have had to forego these opportunities (Ray 1992:114).

Ray also points out the advantage that she had over other Canadians with regard to "student debts," (1992:144) as she never had any and therefore, could pursue more opportunities compared to other Canadians:

I always knew that if I tried something that turned out to be a flop I could always go back home and think about what I would do next. This made it possible for me to pursue some opportunities with little security attached to them, which in the long-term carried greater career potential than more secure options. It allowed me to take risks and learn the true meaning of "nothing ventured,

nothing gained" (Ray 1992:114).

Most of the Indo-Canadian respondents in Thunder Bay discussed these advantages in the form of pursuit of education, financial support from parents, reliance on parents in times of need, and so on. As previously discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, comments such as "We have probably have more things than any Canadian person gets them together you know. Um like we have so much family support, so much of everything" and, "I can say about Asians that if they are still keeping their values that their parents give up everything to feed and educate their kids" were commonly given by most of the respondents (#13 and #2).

Ray (1992) also discusses the presence of sexism in the dominant Euro-Canadian society and in the Indian society and its impact on women. According to her, although sexism is present in both societies, the one in the dominant society is of a different variety compared with that in the Indian society. Sexism of dominant society is oppressive because it devalues women and the role of motherhood. She terms the sexism of dominant Euro-Canadian society as the sexism of the "pet" variety (1992:115). This type of sexism regards women as adorable like pets and good only for occupations such as "nuns, teachers and nurses" (1992:115). The option of being a mother also exists, is devalued. Sexism of Indian society, on the other hand, glorifies motherhood and femininity. Ray terms the sexism of the Indian society as the "pedestal variety" (1992:115). Women are regarded as strong people capable of even becoming prime ministers, but "they should not do these things because motherhood is more important. They should only do these things if the motherhood option is not there . . ."

(Ray 1992:116). According to Ray, both types of sexism have similar impact in that "both types restrict our choices" (1992:116).

As discussed previously, similar ideas were put forth by some of the Indo-Canadian respondents. One second-generation respondent discussed the value attached to motherhood in the Indian society and how it oppresses women.

### **1. Oppositionally Active Whiteness**

"Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" which was evident in most of the interviews is an identity formation that is strategically reactive (Puar 1995). This type of identity is empowering in the sense that people can depersonalize themselves and fit into the dominant European society without conforming to its values. A similar idea becomes evident in Himani Bannerji's essay 'Re:Turning the Gaze' (1995). "Oppositionally active 'whiteness'" comes through in the idea that power relationship can be changed by, instead of being 'gazed' at, to turn around the 'gaze' on dominant society so that it is not the dominant society looking down, but the 'other' self looking down at the dominant society and returning the 'gaze' that way. Bannerji points towards this type of power involved identity by turning around the 'gaze' and by telling the dominant society how it looks like from her eyes. Thus, the table is turned and the 'gaze' is coming from a different perspective. This is also one of the aspects of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" because that is also a power involved identity in resisting the dominant images, and also by retaining elements of a distinct culture being aware of the dominant society's expectations.

This idea of empowerment was also evident in most of my interviews. It came

through when the respondents seemed to turn the 'gaze' around and pointed out what they perceive to be problematic in the dominant culture. One respondent sums up this kind of identity in a very clear manner. As discussed in Chapter Three this respondent expressed her anger at the Euro-Canadian society's practice of stereotyping non-European people and their cultures and said that people should take those stereotypes out "cause they are giving us a bad rap. And then in turn we rebel against them and we do the same things to them. We say, 'well, this is what's bad about your culture' instead of maybe you are coming to a some sort of compromise on both" (#13, second-generation woman, age 26, arrived at the age of 13).

### **5.3 MULTICULTURALISM IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE**

The ethnically and racially diverse nature of the Canadian society was given recognition by the policy of multiculturalism in 1971. However, the idea of multiculturalism has not been incorporated fully into public policies (Naidoo 1986). Although multiculturalism replaced the ideology of assimilation in theory, its goals and objectives remain outside the comprehension of many Canadians. A lot of research points towards a general lack of knowledge of the concepts of multiculturalism. Berry et al. (1977), for example, point out that most people remain ignorant of the fact that multiculturalism actually promotes the idea of retention of different cultures rather than merely allowing people to do so (Naidoo 1986:134). This can explain, in part, the form of identity construction through which people criticize members of their own community for retaining their cultures. As discussed in Chapter Three, one respondent criticized members of her community for dressing in their own cultural clothes and for cooking

Indian food even after coming to Canada, and yet, when asked what food she cooks in the house this respondent replied, "East Indian vegetarian" (#1, first-generation woman, age 53, arrived at the age of 27). As Vijay Agnew (1996) points out, although we have this official policy of multiculturalism, it is not really clear to people how that is meant to operate (1996:82). Consequently, it does lead to a kind of confusion of identity in some ways because, on the one hand, it promotes the idea that people should retain their cultures and in fact celebrate what's unique and different about them, and on the other hand, there's still a sense that to be accepted one has to be a European derived kind of Canadian.

Bolaria and Li analyze this self-contradictory policy of multiculturalism and its conflicting messages. According to them, the inclusion of different cultures other than the British and French is done only at the superficial levels rather than the structural level and only for the purposes of maintaining the status quo which, as the State is aware, can be threatened by extreme manifestation of racism (Srivastava and Ames 1993:135). According to them, multiculturalism is a strategy employed by the State meant to give the public the impression that the State is promoting the idea of racial equality. Karl Peter (1981) maintains that instead of working towards changing the existing political and social institutions multiculturalism actually helps to promote them (Agnew 1996:82).

A similar lack of knowledge of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism is to be found in much of the literature on South Asian immigrants. As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, most of this research has been done using the ethnic/assimilation model

which is completely in opposition to the goals and objectives of the policy of multiculturalism. Furthermore, most of this type of research in Canada is not "theoretically" located in Canadian political and economic frame (Srivastava and Ames 1993:129). Rather, "theories of 'ethnicity' and 'assimilation,' largely originating in the United States, have been transplanted wholesale to Canada, with little discussion of their cross-cultural reliability" (Srivastava and Ames 1993:129). Naidoo (1978) in her discussion of the policy of multiculturalism and Euro-Canadians' attitudes towards it, points out the discrepancy that exists between the goals and objectives of the policy and the actual practice which can lead to confusion and disappointment on the part of immigrants as their "expectation of retaining cultural identity with dignity' meets up with the reality of white Canadian resistance, negativity and hostility" (Naidoo, quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993:129).

There is yet another criticism of multiculturalism prevalent in Canada today which is its narrow conception of 'ethnicity' as an individual attribute (Srivastava and Ames 1993:131). According to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 'ethnicity' is "a sense of identity rooted in a common origin," and 'culture' is "a way of being, thinking and feeling" (Quoted in Srivastava and Ames 1993:131). According to Srivastava and Ames, such "profoundly individualist, anti-materialist, static and depoliticized definitions help to define a multicultural policy which promotes 'symbolic' (food, song and dance) ethnicity to 'break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies'" (1993:131).

#### **5.4 FOUCAULT AND POWER**

According to Foucault, 'knowledge' is power "not just in the sense that knowledge enables people to acquire power, but also in the sense that those in power determine what is to count as knowledge" (Agnew 1996:94). It determines the right or obligation for one perspective to define another, and also for a person to act in a particular way. It is in this perspective that the Euro-Canadian society can define who is to be considered a 'Canadian' and who is not. This knowledge produced by the dominant society comes to be seen as truth, and is reinforced through the 'gaze' and the disciplinary practices which we all internalize. The result of this is the creation of a society which sometimes consciously, and other times without being aware of it, conforms to dominant society's ideas through practices of discipline. Thus, marginalized and excluded groups might internalize the dominant society's definitions and ideals. As seen in Chapter Two and Three, some of the respondents referred to Euro-Canadians as 'Canadians' and Indo-Canadians as Indians. In this sense they were actually othering themselves. As most of the respondents discussed in Chapter Three and Four the dominant society members refuse to see them as 'Canadians' and constantly refer to Indo-Canadians as Indians, South Asians, or immigrants, and not as 'Canadians.' This is often internalized by the women, and many times without being aware of it they use the dominant society's terms of reference despite the fact that it does not match their own self perceptions of definitions. Foucault also asserts that power and resistance may coexist. This again becomes evident in the women's struggles to be accepted as 'Canadians.' Even though they might refer to themselves

as Indians they still desire to be looked at as 'Canadians.' In fact, as discussed in the interviews, they assert their right to be recognized as 'Canadians.' Resistance to dominant ideals is also evident through practices such as "oppositionally active 'whiteness'."



## **CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION**

The focus of this thesis is an identification of the perspectives of Canadian women of South Asian origin and an analysis of the ways in which they construct their identity in relation to the Euro-Canadian society. Among the themes which were explored were, flexibility and fluidity of identity, experiences of racism, stereotyping, othering, assumptions about other cultures, different ways of constructing identity, and gender roles and identity. It is evident from my respondents' narratives that instead of being static and bounded a person's identity is actually flexible and fluid, and many times depends on the context or the situation. These aspects of identity were illuminated by respondents' discussions on how they refer to themselves in different situations, their desire not to restrict themselves to any one way of life, their changed outlook on the way they were brought up, and the discussions on raising children.

Racism, stereotyping, assumptions, and othering were experienced in a variety of ways through challenges about Indian marriages, stereotypes of Indian marriages and other cultural aspects, perceptions and comments about Indian clothes, and general perceptions of Euro-Canadians about Indo-Canadians. Particular instances of racism, stereotyping, assumptions and 'othering' were cited in the form of majority society's views about Indian clothing, comments about 'arranged marriages,' comments about religious practices, assumptions about their intolerance to the cold weather and challenges from Euro-Canadians about South Asian Canadians' 'Canadianness.' Second-generation respondents discussed how the racism they had experienced when growing up in Canada affected them at the time and its longer-term effects.

Many different forms of constructing identity when faced with racism, stereotyping, and othering became evident from the interviews. One form of identity construction was a reluctance to acknowledge racism, or, even denial of racism, and in one case even holding the minority people themselves responsible for the racism that they experience. The tendency to recognize but ignore racism, othering and so on, was noticed in first-generation as well as second-generation respondents. It became evident that even when people can clearly cite incidents that they know are racist or stereotypical they are reluctant to talk about them as typical experiences, or they ignore them, convincing themselves that the actions were not intentional. Another form of identity construction absorbs racial and cultural stereotypes so that when people talk about India, for example, their discussion is often based on those stereotypes. In other cases, people are aware of those stereotypes but feel unable to resist them. There was another form of identity construction in which the respondent seemed to reject the dominant culture in order to protect her own.

### **6.1 "OPPOSITIONALLY ACTIVE 'WHITENESS' AS A FORM OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Using insights from post-colonial literature, the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" (Puar 1995) was explored. According to Puar, "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" is a process of responding to and resisting hegemonic European values in a such a way that it seems as though a person is conforming to majority European society's values when in reality the person is forming a new identity which is strategically reactive. In other words, people can function quite

'normally' in the dominant society without giving up their own identity or subjectivity.

This was one of the strategies which was evident in a lot of different ways in the interviews. This method of constructing identity was present in the interviews, sometimes directly and other times in more subtle ways, in the discussions on clothing, food, language, participation in community functions, Indian and European systems of marriage, and discussions on Euro-Canadian culture and South Asian cultures.

Most of the research done on people of South Asian origin does not look at their own perspectives and fails to examine how people construct their own identity. Although dominant European feminism has recently begun to address issues of concern to non-European women, it often studies them as a group very homogeneous in nature and does not consider how people perceive themselves and how they construct their own identities. The present study challenges these conventional approaches and shows that identity, instead of being a static object, or state of mind that can be lost, is flexible and fluid. Moreover, its contradictory and complex nature allows for it to be negotiated for survival. We need to look carefully at the identity construction of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'" and recognize that even when people are behaving in ways which appear to conform to dominant ideas and expectations these may instead be instances of "oppositionally active 'whiteness'," or other strategic responses which can only be understood through an analysis of respondents' own perceptions.

## **6.2 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This thesis points to a number of directions in which future research would be

beneficial. One of the issues that I have not addressed is the issue of class and caste. This was not feasible given the size of the South Asian community in Thunder Bay and my concern to protect respondents' anonymity, but in a future, and more expanded study it would be important also to add the dimension of class and caste. Bannerji (1995) points out the importance of looking at class, culture, and gender together. According to her, these three dimensions cannot be separated because the experiences of women of South Asian origin in Canada are different depending on what class they belong to, where they live, and who they come into contact with. Middle and upper class women may be better regarded because they are interacting with a community that finds their culture exotic, or who may appreciate their skills or talents as professionals. For the working class women, however, especially the ones that are working in more marginalized sectors of the labour market, racism is really felt intensely in the work space and all other aspects of life. Class therefore, can have an impact even in terms of how much racism one experiences, what resources one has to respond to that, and what type of identity one can construct faced with that situation.

As this sample was limited to a relatively small community it would be interesting to comparatively explore these issues (flexibility and fluidity of identity, and "oppositionally active 'whiteness'") in a larger urban community. It would also be interesting to make comparisons between the South Asian Canadian community in Thunder Bay and South Asian Canadian communities in other larger urban communities to find out whether there is a difference in experience in terms of racism, stereotyping, and othering. It would be useful in future research to find out how

**"oppositionally active 'whiteness'" is responded to by the dominant society and whether or not it is recognized and respected.**

**Their Plan****Who says**

I should wear a skirt

**Who says**

The Earth is dirt

**Who says**

I should look like you

**Who says**

I should do as you do

**Who says**

It's time to eat

**Who says**

I should eat meat

**Who says**

I should comb my hair

**Who says**

The best is 'fair'

**I am**

What I am

I'll do what

I can

to destroy

Their plan.

("Their Plan," Sista Roots. In Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain. Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins, eds. pp.22, 1987).

**APPENDIX A****INTERVIEW SCHEDULE****A. GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. Your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where were you born?
4. How old were you when you came to Canada?
5. Where did you come to Canada from?
6. Did you come directly to Thunder Bay?
7. Did you come alone or with other family members?
8. Did you come to meet other family members?
9. Were you the first one in the family to come?
10. Do you have any extended family members in Canada or in India?
11. Do you visit them a lot?

**B. INFORMATION ON ETHNIC BACKGROUND**

12. How would you refer to yourself -- for example, as Canadian, Punjabi, Gujarati, or, South Asian Canadian?
13. Is that the way you refer to yourself in Canada, or, in India, or, in both places?
14. When you are together with your community how do you refer to yourself?
15. What kind of clothing do you wear at home or when you go out? Why?
16. What food do you eat in the house?

17. What language do you speak in the house?
18. What language are you teaching your children to speak?
19. Do you participate in your cultural community functions? Why?
20. Do you have South Asian Canadian friends in Thunder Bay?
21. If not, do you miss that?
22. What do you miss about it?
23. Do you have any Euro-Canadian friends here?
24. Are they different from your South Asian Canadian friends? If so, why?
25. How do you feel about the images Euro-Canadians have of Indian marriages?
26. Has anybody asked you whether you 'arranged' your marriage?
27. What are you going to do about your children's marriage?
28. How do you think Euro-Canadians perceive South Asian Canadians? Can you give me a specific example which made you think like this?
29. How do you perceive Euro-Canadians? What differences do you see between Euro-Canadians and South Asian Canadians?

### **C. GENDER ROLES**

30. How are you raising children – with European Canadian values or with South Asian Canadian values?
31. What do you think women's roles are in India?
32. Have these roles changed for you?
33. If so, how?
34. How do women's roles in India compare to women's roles in the Euro-Canadian society?



35. Do you think women should participate in public places – in politics etc.? Why?
36. What are the appropriate roles for women in your opinion?
37. How are you raising your daughters – is it different from the way daughters are raised in the Euro-Canadian society or the same?
39. Is the way you raise children different from the way Euro-Canadians raise children?
40. Do you think daughters and sons should be raised differently? Why?
41. Do you think that is different in the Euro-Canadian society?
42. What expectations do you have of your daughters and sons. What do you hope them to accomplish in life?

**APPENDIX B****OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS QUOTED IN THE TEXT**

The following is a list of the open-ended interviews quoted in the text. Basic biographical data on the respondents is provided after each entry to assist the reader in contextualizing informants' comments in the text.

1. First-generation woman, age 53, born in Uganda, arrived at the age of 27 (#1).
2. First-generation woman, age 48, born in India, arrived at age of 27 (#2).
3. Second-generation woman, age 20, born in Canada (#3).
4. Second-generation woman, age 26, born in India, arrived at the age of 8 (#4).
5. First-generation woman, age 22, born in India, arrived at the age of 16 (#5).
6. First-generation woman, age 39, born in India, arrived at the age of 23 (#6).
7. First-generation woman, age 32, born in India, arrived at the age of 25 (#7).
8. First-generation woman, age 52, born in India, arrived at the age of 45 (#8).
9. First-generation woman, age 30, born in India, arrived at the age of 29 (#9).
10. First-generation woman, age 49, born in India, arrived at the age of 30 (#10).
11. Second-generation woman, age 27, born in India, arrived at the age of 5 (#11).
12. First-generation woman, age 34, born in Tanzania, arrived at the age of 28 (#12).
13. Second-generation woman, age 26, born in India, arrived at the age of 13 (#13).
14. Second-generation woman, age 24, born in India, arrived at the age of 12 (#14).
15. Second-generation woman, age 27, born in Uganda, arrived at the age of 5 (#15).

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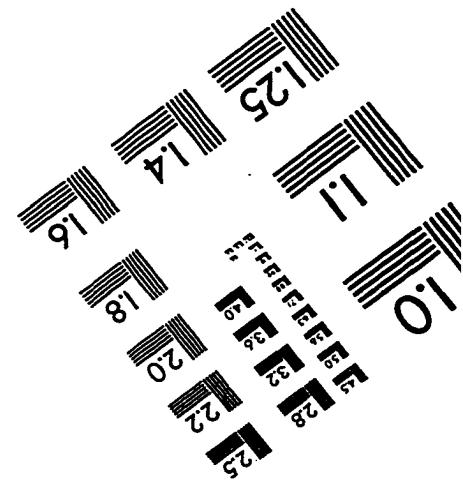
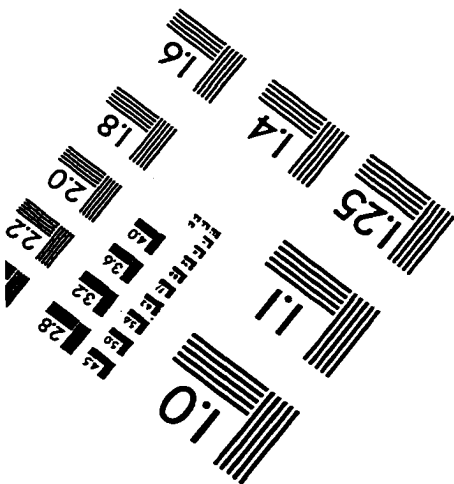
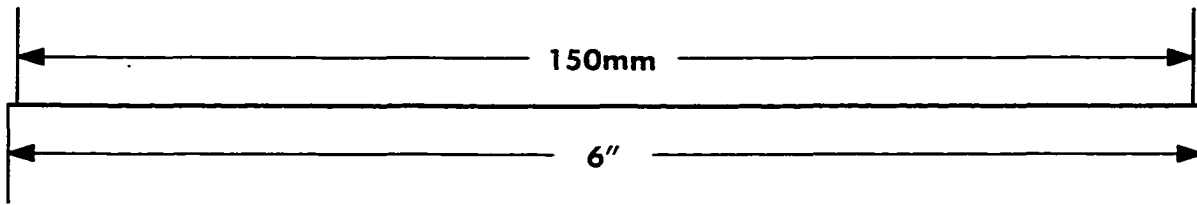
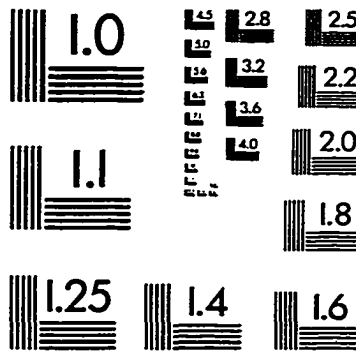
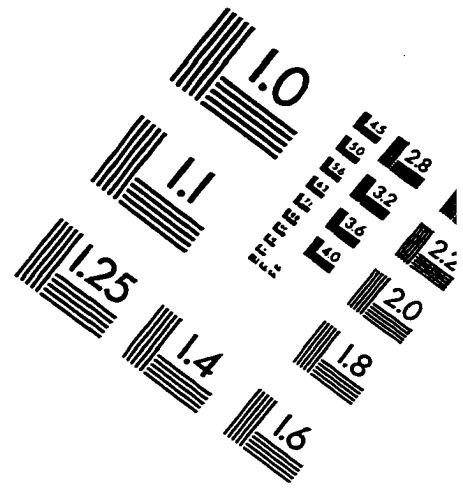
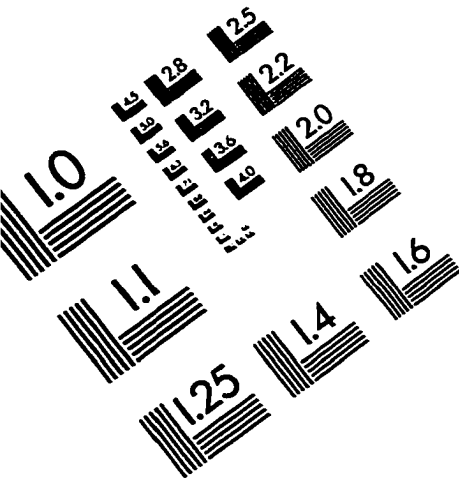
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