IDENTITY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: GIRLS FROM A MINORITY ETHNO-CULTURAL GROUP IN CANADA[1]

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"Identity . . . is a matter of becoming as well as of being"

Stuart Hall

ABSTRACT. This article looks at identity as an important factor in integration into society. Integration is not only a personal and individual process; it is also a dialectical one. It involves contradictions (conflicts) in individual self-construction (identity). It also implies construction and re-construction of social relationships related to an individual's experiences defined by their location in terms of gender, race, culture and class. This process of reconstruction of identity is what has been called "a process of 'becoming' and 'being'." Canadian girls of South Asian origin strive hard to live up to their parents' expectations and yet they do not possess culture in a form identical to their parents. They are creating a hybrid identity in a new context using part of the cultural capital from their parents and creating a "space" for themselves in Canadian society.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article perçoit l'identité comme facteur important d'intégration dans la société. L'intégration n'est pas seulement un processus personnel et individuel, mais un processus dialectique. Il comprend des contradictions (conflits) dans la construction du moi (identité). Il présuppose également la construction et la reconstruction de rapports sociaux ayant un rapport avec les expériences des sujets définis par la place qu'ils occupent sur le plan du sexe, de la race, de la culture et de la classe. Ce processus de reconstruction identitaire est ce que l'on appelle «le processus du 'devenir' et de l''être'». Les jeunes filles canadiennes originaires d'Asie du Sud s'évertuent à répondre aux attentes de leurs parents, même si elles ne possèdent pas une culture dont la forme est identique à celle de leurs parents. Elles créent donc une identité hybride dans un contexte nouveau en utilisant partiellement le capital culturel de leurs parents et en créant un «espace» pour elles-mêmes dans la société canadienne.

The politics of identity has implications for educational success. Therefore, as teachers we must understand identity as a concept and be aware of how it is constructed. Key issues relate, on the one hand, to the implications of

identity for self-esteem, empowerment and school achievement. On the other hand, because of the significance of identity in constructing political and social identities, teachers must concern themselves with identity construction in children from all minority cultures for integration and interaction with the dominant culture.

This article begins with three basic questions: What is the connection between the construction of identity and education? Why discuss minority children? Why focus on girls? The next section discusses the concept of identity construction and the issue of social integration with Canadian society. The paper ends with an analysis of identity issues in the process of integration in a multicultural society in the lives of girls from a visible minority[2] group who trace their origins to South Asia.[3] Data was obtained in 1995 from a large study conducted in four cities across Canada, namely, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and Calgary.

Identity and education

Who we are and what we think locate us in the educational process (Mohanty, 1990). Knowledge is directly tied to people's differences (from the dominant group) in terms of race[4] and ethnicity, gender and class (among other social constructions) because such differences locate and situate people in relation to the dominant group. By mediating knowledge, education links power and empowerment with inequalities in society.

Cultural reproduction theorists have analyzed the school's legitimizing function in reproducing social hierarchies through school knowledge. Those who do not have the "cultural capital"[5] (Bourdieu, 1973) or the "language codes" (Bernstein, 1977) required for success in schools are alienated because of racial, ethnic, gender and class differences (Apple, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital and language codes refer to the cultural and linguistic skills, and social values such as modes of thinking and speaking, particular meanings and styles of behaviour acquired from the family through socialization.

Identity is not merely a result of socialization. Rather, identities are formed in social processes and relationships. The differences in cultural capital that children possess, because of variance in minority cultures, result in differences in communication and interaction styles, cognitive and learning styles (Ghosh, 1996a). These differences make it necessary for the teacher, as mediator in the education process, to develop a knowledge base on which to build an understanding of the students they teach. Knowledge of students is imperative if teachers are to guide their learning experiences and help students to see the connections between what is learnt in schools and their lived experiences.

Education involves acquiring conceptual schemes. It is not merely collect-ing disjointed knowledge. To learn is to connect, and students must make meaning of new knowledge in relation to their experiences and what they know. Educators then, must understand student experiences and build on them. And because their experiences are different, their identities are produced differently. This understanding is essential if teachers are to pro-vide students with the analytical tools to challenge negative experiences and deal with problems of unresolved identities.

Pedagogy should then be developed around identity and meaning for all students. Pedagogy, the process of knowledge production and reproduction (Lusted, 1986), is concerned with the content and methods of teaching. It involves the teaching process that encompasses interactive discourse as well as practice. Both educational discourse (what is said and written) and educational practice (what is done in terms of activities) are guided by ideologies of the dominant group. Pedagogy, therefore, mediates the organi-zation of social reality and change through the language and signs of the majority culture. What effect does this have on minority group children? This question is particularly significant in immigrant countries that have a large diversity of minority ethno-cultural groups. Moreover, globalization has made international migration a necessity, resulting in multicultural societies in all countries. As educators, we must be aware that the injuries of racial, ethnic, gender, class and life-style discrimination are often hidden but they are nonetheless painful.

The important question for education is whether teacher education pro-grams are responding to the needs of the changing societal and school demography in the preparation of teachers in a diverse society.

Minority children and the construction of identity

The term "minority group" is used in the sociological sense to refer to groups who are powerless in relation to the dominant group in society. The term, as used here, includes racial and ethno-cultural groups (particularly non-white people) and women, although there are other classifications based on class, religion, sexual orientation, special needs, and so on. Minority groups are defined by both objective and subjective criteria, that is, the fact of discrimination and the awareness of being disadvantaged. Their minority status is not based on numerical strength. It is the political position of a group, not the sophistication of its culture, that depicts it as "minor."

Individual and collective identities are constructed in three different areas: the biological, the social and the cultural (Aronowitz, 1992). Our biological attributes (such as race and gender) become meaningful when they are

defined in our interactions with people. While gender, race and ethnic identities are ascribed at birth and cannot be easily changed, class position is also assigned at birth but can be changed. The given characteristics do not have meaning in themselves. Concepts of race, ethnicity, gender and class are social constructions. Audre Lorde (1984) points out that it is not the differences in themselves but the social construction and *conceptualization* of these differences that provide meaning. As sociological ideas, these concepts have changed over time and are not fixed. For example, in contemporary Canada racism is seen as discrimination directed mainly at non-white groups. This was not always the case. Eastern Europeans were subjected to racism in Canada at the turn of the century when some white races were considered superior to others (Banks, 1995). The classifications of race, ethnicity and gender indicate changing power relations and are symbolic of underlying power struggles (Goldberg, 1992). Power relations invariably denote oppressive consequences, whether conscious (and obvious) or not.

In his powerful essay "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor (1992) defines identity as a person's understanding of who s/he is, of her/his fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. And how one defines oneself is partly dependent on the recognition, mis-recognition, or absence of recognition by others. "Non-recognition or mis-recognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 1992, p. 25).

The experiences of children, particularly how they are perceived or identified in school and among their peers, have a direct impact on the construction of their identities. As organizations, schools are a system of shared experiences whose meanings are experienced by people (Ghosh, 1996a). All school personnel, such as administrators, teachers and support staff, are involved in influencing the construction of students' identities by the way they interact with them and the manner in which they deal with conflicts. What the teacher expects, the invisible biases and hidden inequalities in classroom interactions influence how a student perceives him/herself.

Cultural identities are based on how we identify ourselves as well as on our identification by others. How we identify ourselves is based on our experiences of the past and present social, cultural and economic relations. How others define us is influenced by the "dilemma of differences" (Minow, 1990), that is, how our differences from the "norm" are viewed and constructed. The norm is based on the physical, cultural and value attributes of the majority culture, that is the dominant group – the English in most of Canada (anglophone), or the French in the province of Quebec (francophone).

For South Asian (SA) girls, social distance or ranking is not only constructed on their gender and race/ethnicity, but also on the socio-economic, educational and occupational levels of their parents. Their parents' cultural

paradigms frame their identity to a large degree. The extent of the parents' integration into Canadian society varies considerably and their traditional attitudes range from very traditional to global values.

Girls and their identity

While women are a numerical majority in North America, they constitute a minority in terms of access to power, status and privilege in society. The daughters of South Asian Canadian women, like other girls, grow up in society with minority status as females and may experience discrimination. However, as minority feminist scholars have pointed out, the experiences of minority women are different from those of women from the majority culture. It is not only that they are potentially subject to two forms of oppression (sexism and racism), but that the combination of the two makes it *different*, not simply more acute. The multiple instances/levels of oppression may induce what Carty (1993) and Mohanty (1997) have called multi-layered marginalization in the lives of non-European women. Not to recognize this difference in experiences is to deny the differences in the sexism which black and white women experience, and the racism which men and women encounter. It also ignores the positive aspects of racial, gender and class identities (Spelman, 1982). Another reason for focusing on girls is to unmask the underlying power differentials in gender relations.

The experiences of girls of South Asian origin in Canada are different from those of other cultures and countries. This is because South Asian Canadians, particularly the women, have been seen to be at great variance not only in racial terms (i.e., biological characteristics) but also in ethnic terms (i.e., culturally different) especially in behaviour patterns and personal grooming (Buchignani, 1979; Naidoo, 1978). Girls, more than boys, usually face conflicts between the culture and values of home and those of their peers and the wider Canadian society. Confused mother-daughter identity issues (Guzder, 1991; 1992) underscore the generation gap.

The concept of identity

In feminist poststructuralist discourse, the struggle over identity within the subject is inseparable from the struggle over the meaning of identities and subject positions in the larger society. The positioning of girls in society is essential to the understanding of their experiences. To quote Stuart Hall:

> Identities are different names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past . . . (identity) is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. . . far from being fixed in some essentialized past they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (1990, p. 225)

Contemporary conceptions of identity are influenced by postmodern/ poststructural / postcolonial writers who reject theoretical discourses which conceptualize identity as a state (which can be measured) rather than as process. Earlier discussions of identity were located in the area of personality as "a person's essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual" (Reber, 1985, p. 341). Social identity research challenged this individualistic frame and subjective definition of the notion of identity as a stabilized factor, an essential personality trait.

Identity is no longer seen as a static, unitary trait. Identity is now seen as being formed in social processes and is seen in terms of relations because human beings are always in the making. People construct their identities within the social framework. As such, identities are constantly shifting and renegotiable, and the search for new/modified identities, therefore, is a coping mechanism in the confusion caused by migration and global changes. At the individual level, those who identify with a group can redefine the meaning and norms of group identity.

Identity is formed along multiple axes such as race, gender, nationality, sexual preference, etc. Identity surfaces at the individual level but each person has many "social identities" such as ethnic, sexual, and class identities which develop meaning in people's lives both at the ideological/political and social/cultural level. People's multiple identities are not apparent in all contexts and represent different spheres of reality in everyday life. Different ones are important at different times.

Social integration in Canada

Canada was the first nation in the world with an official Multicultural Act (Bill C-93 – Canada, 1988). At first a policy declared by Prime Minister Trudeau in Parliament in 1971, multiculturalism was for a "just society." By encouraging the preservation of heritage cultures and languages, the implication was that ethno-cultural differences would not affect equality of opportunity in a "just" and integrated society. This was a radical change in political ideology from a policy of assimilation into the dominant English language and culture.

Multiculturalism has been defined in various ways in Canada and continues to be controversial. As a political ideology it has provided Canada with a national distinction from the U.S. and legitimated the place of ethno-cultural groups (along with the French and English) in Canadian society. Its first objective, to assist all cultural groups to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, was addressed to minority cultures rather than to both majority and minority groups. The second objective, assistance to minority groups in overcoming cultural barriers, was aimed at language learning. However, this objective implies cultural deficiency among minor-

ity groups rather than a need for adjustment (in both majority and minority cultures) and redefinition of majority culture. The third objective, that of promoting inter-group relations, was supposed to aim at reducing racial and ethnic discrimination. This was the weakest part of the policy until the Multiculturalism Act (Canada, 1988) and the recent establishment of the Race-Relations Directorate. *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, (Canada, 1982a) improved on previous constitutional guarantees which protect the individual rights of women and ethnic group members, and introduced legal provisions (or protections) to prevent discrimination on grounds of ethnicity or race.[6]

The concept of multiculturalism has changed over time with equity and anti-discrimination measures added in recent years to widen its meaning. Several policy initiatives and legislation have strengthened this. In its initial stages, multiculturalism was interpreted and implemented in a manner which stripped culture of its political aspect and implied consensus within the rhetoric of a "just" society. It focused almost exclusively on cultural pluralism (in terms of cultural retention) rather than on equity issues. The Multiculturalism Act of 1988 calls on the government to foster equality and access for all Canadians. This change in interpretation of multiculturalism from recognizing diversity to promoting full and equitable participation of Canadians of all origins is a crucial one. The objective of the new Race Relations and Cross-Cultural Understanding Program is to eliminate racial discrimination at the individual and institutional levels. The 1986 federal Employment Equity Act (Canada, 1986) involves removal of barriers that limit the participation and life chances of women and visible minorities (as well as native and disabled persons).

In *The Vertical Mosaic*, John Porter (1965) depicted Canadian society as one of hierarchy based principally on ethnicity and class. Those groups, which were seen to be at greatest variance from the Anglophone (English-speaking) and Francophone (French-speaking) majority cultures (in terms of social distance), were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Studies show that in 1986, after 15 years of Multicultural Policy, inequality in socio-economic status was more marked among ethnic groups than it was between genders (Lautard & Guppy, 1990). The penetration of ethnic group members into elite groups remains limited although certain visible minorities are "visible" in a number of professions (Lautard & Guppy, 1990), but this may be influenced by immigrations policies.

Some indicators of integration of girls of South Asian origin in mainstream Canadian society are to look at their friends, social activities, and whom they marry when they grow up, and their success in finding employment. Academic success is not necessarily a good indicator of integration into society. In general, South Asians value education very highly. However,

while the perception that South Asian students in North America are doing well academically has been supported by statistics, especially in the United States, there are several problems with this perception. Students who do not fall into this stereotype undergo tremendous pressure and their needs are not met. Students' experiences are of course, related to how they are positioned in terms of class and type of school. They may experience racial harassment such as racial slurs, jokes, name-calling, acts of physical violence (Talbani, 1991). Even when girls do well academically, their school experiences may be painful. If they resist, they may be singled out as troublemakers or ignored.

In the larger context, physical and behavioural differences with the majority group, and additional differences in personal appearance for women, make them "visible" (but invisible in terms of power). Within the group, heterogeneity in religion, language, class, education, language ability (English /French), socialization, knowledge of western social etiquette and values, all contribute to the construction of positive or negative experiences depending on how they are "located" in social situations. Significant class differences in women's lifestyles cut across religious and ethnic lines. Yet among Canadian women of South Asian origin these are less obvious and cannot be viewed here in Canada, in the same context as in the Indian subcontinent.

Still a small group, people of South Asian origin are among the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population due to the changes in immigration regulations. South Asian Canadians are a relatively new group, and the majority are first generation Canadians (except in the province of British Columbia) although their children are now getting married and producing second genera- tion Canadians. There were 670,590 South Asians in Canada according to the 1996 Census (Canada, 1996) representing 2.2% of the total population (over half live in the province of Ontario). South Asians form 20% of the total visible minority population.

Some characteristics of the group of South Asian Canadians are contrary to the national average due to immigration patterns: a younger population, a larger proportion in the younger than older age groups and more males than females. After standardization for age differences, the 1996 census data indicates that South Asians have higher labour force participation rates (69% for all South Asians and 77% for men) than most non-visible minorities. While 22% are in professions and service industries, 19% are in manual work.

English and French (25%) are the two official languages at the federal level. Among SA Canadians, 86.5 % speak one of the two languages, 7.7 % are bilingual and 5.8 % do not speak either of these languages (D'Costa, 1992). A well-educated group (higher than national average of university degrees), their present occupational composition and median income do not vary significantly from the national figures; 75% of them are Canadian citizens (D'Costa, 1992).

Studies show that SA immigrants achieve economic security comparatively quickly (Canada, 1974).

The need for economic security leads to emphasis on adaptation to the economic structure. Studies indicate that around 60% SA Canadian women work and are able to secure at least minimally satisfactory jobs soon after arrival (Buchignani, 1979; Ghosh, 1981). The labor market situation has been unfavourable to women, even more so to visible minority women. For traditional SA Canadian women, the social distance caused by sex-specific behavior, dress and personal grooming (hair style, tikka), have not facilitated employment. Yet, South Asian Canadian women are at two ends of the employment scale – a minority at the top and the majority at the bottom.

The study

Data was gathered from 200 interviews[7] of second-generation Canadian females aged 15-19 and whose parents had immigrated to Canada directly from South Asia (and not from places like Fiji, South Africa or the Caribbean where there are many people of South Asian origin). The girls were either in school or had begun their university education in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Calgary. They were either born in Canada or had emigrated very early in their lives and grew up in Canada. There were no significant regional differences in the data among the four cities.

The experiences of these girls were very varied according to the differences in the social, economic and educational backgrounds of their parents. There were also some variations due to religious differences as well as related to the country they came from in the South Asian region. Geographical dislocation, the need to obtain jobs and economic security, for professionals to get qualifications accredited and requirements of writing exams, make all immigrant parents prone to stress. Additional factors such as differences in terms of race, culture and dependent status, the absence of close kinship ties, extreme weather conditions, all interrelate to make the experiences of South Asians complex. The mothers of the girls interviewed have often been expected to forego desires for career, take up part-time employment or have career interruptions. Professional fields like medicine involve writing qualifying exams, teachers and engineers require re-certification and upgrading of qualifications. Women's needs have tended to be secondary to the similar needs of their husbands.

In general, the parents who had emigrated from South Asia had been socialized in the traditional values of a hierarchical society, which, at the time of their growing up had not been influenced by globalization. Immigrants tend to preserve the values of the society they leave, and have difficulty in acknowledging that values and norms are not static and are changing considerably in their home countries (Ghosh, 1996b). So, when their girls are growing up in Canada they tend to frame their child-rearing practices by the traditional family and

cultural paradigms. The system of beliefs developed during their earlier years influences the lives of their daughters. The shaping of identities of the girls must be analyzed against this background.

There were some girls in this study who were not facing culture clash and conflicts to the extent that some others were experiencing. Several girls were very focused and doing very well in school, and their parents were supportive of them in their academic as well as social lives. However, many others faced conflict and identity crises.

EDUCATION: For all parents, education is the most important issue for both their boys and girls. Marriage for girls is of great significance to both parents but more so, for mothers. Parents leave education to the teachers. They tend to stay away from school activity except in cases where the parents (one or both) are professionals. Mothers, and sometimes fathers help the girls with their homework. The girls generally feel a lot of pressure to excel in school and often feel pressured due to a collective community orientation to high achievement in school and value for traditional subject areas for study. Parents are vulnerable to gossip and ridicule in the community if their children do not perform well in school or if their girls are considered too brash in their dress or conduct. For the girls, school problems are initially associated with differences in cultural content and practices. In addition, difficulties are related with primary cultural differences such as interpersonal and inter-group relations because they may have started school with different cultural assumptions, language problems and differences in behavioral and cognitive styles.[8] Girls tend to successfully cross the cultural boundaries and ultimately the majority perform above average in schools.

RACISM: Even when they are high achievers, the school experience of girls may not have always been a positive one. This was usually so when they experienced racial harassment: "Being a racial minority in grade school was hard. . . . sometimes I went home and prayed that I was White. In high school it was better . . . I did not experience racism from teachers – either that or I was blind to it . . . . Now I am proud to be different." In grade school racist name-calling is more common. By the time they reach university they experience a more subtle form of racism. Their self-confidence is directly proportional to their academic achievement. A large majority of the girls feel that they perform better than the class average.

CAREERS: One source of conflict is parents' aspirations that limit options for their daughters. Increasingly, parents want their daughters to have careers, but possibilities are solidified within a narrow range of traditional middle-class career options (and subjects or fields of study). Often with considerable resistance, second generation SA Canadian girls now tend to approximate the diversity of career options and life styles of the majority culture.

SOCIALIZATION: There are significant differences in the socialization patterns of females in South Asia and in the western world. In South Asia, the cultural context mitigates against strong feminine identifications, and conflicts are averted through socialization into obedient cultural acceptance of familial will in marriage, and denial of sexuality (Guzder, 1991). Sexuality is still one of the most difficult issues to discuss publicly in India (Omvedt, 1990). From the psychological perspective, Guzder (1991; 1992) points out that the idealized feminine-maternal has profound social and psychological implications as a powerful organizer of intra-psychic and socio-cultural processes relevant to many South Asian Canadian women who live with the new dynamics of migration and culture change. Canadian society offers greater potential for independence by presenting a contrasting paradigm, that of a mature woman, independently facing identity and sexuality issues (Ghosh, 1994).

Having been either born or brought up here, the girls face very different situations. On the one hand, they are more comfortable with their surroundings. On the other hand, their parents' experiences and values influence their possibilities and interactions. The ability of the girls to cope with culture clash is linked to the extent to which their parents have been able to work out their location in Canadian society, and how they convey a sense of ethnic identity to their daughters. The majority of girls say that they are constantly aware of their origins: "visible differences cannot be wished away." Some respond to questions about their origins confidently: "being different is also part of being Canadian." Some others deal with their difference uncomfortably: "questions about one's origin seem to define a separateness. Although I have internalized Canadian values, I always feel like a minority within the culture."

What is perhaps more difficult to cope with is that, while they feel "Canadian," they may experience prejudice, discrimination and sexism. Several girls asked: "Who am I?" *They* may feel Canadian and speak with Canadian accents, but others' perception of who they are, their experience of discrimination based on the social construction of ethnicity, race, and gender by others threaten a positive concept of self.

In their private lives girls face conflicts at various levels. The family generally offeres a secure and protective environment, which is characterized by dependence and cohesiveness. Conflicts arise because of clash with western Canadian values of individuation and autonomous functioning, independence in family and social situations, and expressions of sexuality, especially among the daughters. Individuation and independence are usually viewed as disrespect. Often, values regarding child upbringing are frozen in time for first generation parents so that they tend to be more South Asian than their friends and relatives in the home country. Many girls who had traveled to their home countries realize that the fashions and activities of girls there are more universal than traditional, contrary to their parent's projection of their country values. In many ways their

friends and relatives are less restricted than they are. The media revolution has brought globalization to their countries of origin. Yet, their intellectual independence and critical thinking make them uncomfortable in social situations with seniors where such factors are still seen as disrespectful.

CLASH OF HOME AND PEER CULTURES: The conflict between peer and family pressures can cause tremendous confusion for girls. Problems are related mainly to dating and dress. Girls are precariously positioned in the overly protective environment and strongly resent double standards for boys and girls. Differential treatment given to girls as compared to their male siblings tend to cause sibling rivalries. Parent leniency with boys is experienced not only in socializing situations, and choice of field of study and careers. About 40% of the girls interviewed said that they also noticed differential expectations with regard to household chores. Their resentment comes out strongly when they feel their parents do not trust their ability to take care of themselves as much as they have confidence in their sons. Brothers are interrogated less about where and with whom they are going out and when they will come home. A few girls feel that their parents are right to be concerned about their safety while others feel discriminated against. For girls, sexuality is still one of the most difficult issues for parents (especially for fathers) to cope with. Consequently, dating and dress are the most controversial issues for girls and cause considerable stress, friction and guilt (Ghosh, 1996b).

DRESS: Most young SA Canadian girls feel totally restricted socially. According to them, girls often have conflicts over dress: "skirts are too short, tops are too low." Even a strapless evening gown worn for a school dance or prom is contentious: "bells go off in my dad's head!" On special community functions they will wear sarees (once or twice a year): "I just find it cumbersome and very inconvenient."

FRIENDS: Till middle school most girls do not have problems with having friends from school. Parents encourage extra-curricula activities for their girls along with other Canadian kids. Most of the girls interviewed have been to public schools, so they have had boys as classmates. In high school and university they tend to be with South Asian students as much as possible. They are often not allowed to "hang out in malls" as their peers do, and consequently they cannot make friends easily. Often they felt that they are left with the "geeks and losers" and "because of that I grew up like feeling such a loser – in the social sense . . . I was socially retarded, so I made blunders, which have affected me badly." Another girl said that not being able to do things with others made her "feel like a looser, a geek and an introvert – to be non-geek I had to be wholly Canadian."

DATING: Dating for girls is of course, the most difficult to cope with. Parents "cannot possibly understand the boy-girl relationship . . . . When guys call they find it difficult to deal with it, more so my father than my mother." They are

often not allowed to go out with mixed groups: "the word 'bar' unnerves them . . . I am 20, but "drinking" for me is not accepted."

Most girls said that their parents feel very uncomfortable about them dating boys of other cultures. This restriction is partly based on the fear that mixed marriages will not last. But the issue of dating is related to the thought of physical intimacy – the biggest fear (especially among mothers) is about "loss of reputation" and gossip within the community. Added to these factors there is the lack of confidence in the girls' ability to protect themselves.

The parents not only discourage dating in general, they seek other solutions. Some who can afford to, send their girls to private girls' schools in Canada. In extreme cases, they send their girls to expensive single-sex schools in the home country (some to Europe) to avoid being in contact with boys in the school environment. Many of those parents have been shocked that their girls are meeting boys in school dances in their home country.

COPING MECHANISMS: How do the girls who grow up in Canada cope? "Second generation SA Canadian kids learn to become very good liars . . . they have to cover their tracks." Many lead double lives: "I have a boyfriend but my parents don't know . . . my friend went away to university. She has been going out with the same guy for two years and her parents don't know. They are practically living together and they (the parents) have NO idea."

If they do tell their parents, it is "a major trauma for them" and the girls feel hassled and harassed – "it is not worth telling them." Mothers are seen as being more sympathetic and understanding than the fathers. If the relationship is a serious one, "mother will keep it a secret from my father" or even "be comfortably blind." But she will not approve of her dating because she sees it as a "revolving door" which conjures up images of "a physical relationship."

Many would rather not hurt their parents: "I pray that I never hurt my parents again," but what parents don't know will not hurt them. Individuation is viewed as abandonment of family: "If I stand up for myself and won't let them push me around they feel I am disrespecting them but I am not." Guilt is often used as control.

While parents have experienced each culture separately (in South Asia and then in Canada), children who grow up in Canada experience both simultaneously (at home and in the wider society), so they improvise and attempt to create a world more suitable to their situation. Some parents insist their daughters learn classical Indian dancing or music (there are half a dozen such schools in Montreal alone, many more in Toronto, some of which are helped by funds from the Department of Multiculturalism). Some girls whose parents have not insisted on language, religion or dance and music feel "that I do not know enough about my heritage and now I am ready to find out." Others have "romantic notions of being Indian . . . so what I want to do is reconstruction."

They resent their parents for the pressures put on them but come to the realization that "they just don't know better" and are motivated by "what is best for us."

Some students are known, for example, to skip school in Toronto and go to "day dances" (less hassle with parents who are unaware of their whereabouts during the day, and would not let them go at night). They dance to "Bhangra rock" or the songs of "Apache Indian" (a British youth of South Asian origin who sings Bhangra lyrics in English to the reggae beat).

Those who cannot manage to stride the two cultures move out: "When I moved out I went wild because I had been so restricted . . . it was like a culture shock . . . I was out partying till 3 or 4 in the morning for the first three weeks . . . I had to get it out of my system." As a result "my school suffered and I had to go to summer school to make up for bad grades."

MARRIAGE: Conflicts at home are averted through acceptance of parental author-ity in choice of field of study, differential treatment of boys and girls (parents are more protective of girls and boys have greater freedom). This extends to dating and socializing more freely for males, and even marrying white (not black) Canadians. While first generation women tend to view marriage as a life-long commitment regardless of problems, there are, nevertheless, an increasing number of divorces (largely initiated by women of both generations).

Occasionally, parents who are more integrated themselves are happy with their daughters marrying into the majority cultures or to other minority groups. Increasingly, a substantial number of second-generation South Asian women are marrying or living with people (males and females) of their choice. This usually causes conflict and trauma in the family, but their expectation is that their parents will "come to terms with it." They are well aware of whom their parents will approve of as a husband if they choose: "Black is out, Eastern European is not good, nor are East Asians. North American whites are preferred to Europeans." One girl's grandmother gave her an analogy: "Getting married is like baking bread – if you burn it, it gets black; if you keep it raw, it is white; the perfect bread is when it is a nice brown."

Parents encourage attendance of their children but especially their daughters in ethnic functions in the hope that they will socialize with their friends' children. Among them the parents are willing to concede to their daughters marrying from other linguistic groups and castes. However, they still tend to be rigid about crossing religious boundaries. Over half the girls said that their parents, whether they were Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims or Christians, would not agree to inter-religious liaisons. Some knew that no matter what, their parents would not agree to their marrying on their own. One engineering student who had a boyfriend from her class with the same religious and linguistic background faced opposition from her mother. She felt that this opposition was because the

mother did not trust her judgement and also was more ambitious about her marriage prospects (Som, 1998).

The trend now is for girls to agree to "assisted marriages." Both the parents and the girls accept this arrangement. The parents introduce the girls to suitable partners whom they are able to locate by word of mouth or through newspaper ads (more recently, the Internet). The girls get to know their prospective partners and both the men and women have to agree to get married. Parents usually take care of the wedding arrangements.

Girls of South Asian origin potentially face conflicts. Although they are more prone to depression than men, females seldom express familial conflict. There is still a denial or neglect of their health concerns, particularly if they are psychological. Girls are more likely to somatize[9] or express (often in nonverbal ways) conflict to people outside the family and community. However, some cases of suicide attempts, school problems, depression, under-achievement, and elective mutism by children and adolescents are occasionally observed (Guzder, 1992).

Conclusion

Generally, Canadian girls of South Asian origin exhibit considerable ability to construct a complementary situation rooted in traditional values of family and home together with a greater range of freedoms. This we can see in the ways that the girls managed to negotiate spaces for themselves within a somewhat "shifting landscape" in relation to the culture of their parents and a contemporary culture. The policy of multiculturalism has certainly contributed to greater opportunities for minority girls. The Multicultural Act (Canada, 1988) and the Employment Equity Act (Canada, 1986) have changed the focus from an a-political depiction of culture to eliminating barriers and conflicts in society (racism, sexism).

The problem remains, however, that despite the emphasis on democratic principles, emancipatory elements and cultural equity, culture is still an organizing principle, which creates borders around ethnicity and race (as well as gender and class). For SA Canadian girls in contemporary Canada, this can lead to identity problems and conflicts in the private as well as public spheres. Girls strive hard to live up to their parents' expectations and yet they do not possess culture in a form identical to their parents. But because cultural change is NOT an uni-dimensional process, they are creating culture in a new context using part of the cultural capital from their parents rather than "thingifying" their parents' culture and adopting that undiluted. Michael Taussig (1992) uses the word "thingification" to mean the making of culture into possessable commodities. They are exploring and redefining what it means to be Canadian women of South Asian background. This process of reconstruction of identity is what Stuart Hall calls a process of "becoming" and "being." South Asian girls in

Canada often do this by leading dual lives to create a "space" for themselves. The process of identity construction, especially in immigrants, involves "an ambivalent and antagonistic process" (Bhabha and Parekh, 1989, p. 25). Strong ethnic identification with one's own ethnic culture as well as with the dominant culture is the ideal way to integrate because one needs to know where one is coming from in order to know where one is going. Parents are uncomfortable because they do not have points of reference from which to evaluate the new behaviour. A few who cannot reconcile the two cultures experience severe psychological stress and go into depression. Some even attempt suicide.

Integration into society is not only a personal and individual process; it is also a dialectical one. It involves contradictions (conflicts) in individual self-construction (identity), in the construction and re-construction of social relationships, and in the experiences defined by their location in terms of gender, race, culture and class. Although integration is an individual process, girls are often seen as members of a group (and stereotyped) rather than on an individual basis. This paper has looked at identity as an important factor in integration, and the conflicts faced by the girls in terms of the individual's ability to stride several cultures in their interactions with the cultures of home, school and the larger society. Canadian girls of South Asian origin must seize the opportunity to transform their present reality and definition, and establish a new direction with confidence within the politics of possibility in Canadian society.

NOTES

1. Some of the issues discussed in this paper have been reported upon previously by the author.

2. The official designation used to describe non-white groups in Canada is "visible minorities"-distinguished by skin colour in a society where "whiteness" is taken to be the norm. Some people in this group may be recent immigrants, were born in Canada are now second and third generation Canadians, while others are the original Canadians.

3. The term "South Asian" refers to a broad category of people originating in the subcontinent of Asia, namely, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Although they are heterogeneous in language and religion, they share a common history and socio-cultural heritage.

4. Race is used here as a social category and not in the biological sense. While there is no scientific basis for categorizing people into races, the concept of "race" is very real in social consciousness in North America. It has derived its meaning over time through social construction. "Black" and "white" do not represent skin colour (they are inaccurate descriptions). Being black or white expresses personal and group experiences in social interaction, and in the economic and political sphere.

5. Cultural capital is used by Bourdieu to refer to the linguistic and cultural skills, and social values, such as modes of thinking and speaking, particular meanings and styles of behaviour acquired from the family through socialization.

6. Multiculturalism is vaguely mentioned in Section 27.

    The Constitution Act says that the Charter shall be interpreted in a manner which shall be consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians (Canada, 1982b). This has only adjectival relevance because it merely implies ethno-cultural group rights. The Equality Rights in Section 15 of the Charter, which became law

in 1985, guarantee individuals protection against overt forms of discrimination and permit but do not require protections for collective rights of ethnic groups. Section 15(1) of the Charter prohibits discrimination based on gender and race, and section 28 guarantees gender equality. Section 15(2) permits the establishment of affirmative action programs for women even if they contravene section 15(1). Section 2 guarantees fundamental freedoms, also at the individual level.

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8. According to John Ogbu (1978), the initial difficulties of children of voluntary minorities (who voluntarily are in this country as opposed to minorities who were either here or brought here) in school are related to different cultural assumptions, language problems and differences in behavioral and cognitive styles. But, because they do not necessarily give up their own cultural values they tend to adopt a strategy of accommodation. The initial differences are seen as barriers to be overcome in order to achieve their ultimate goals of good education and employment (Ghosh, 1996b).

9. Express or experience distress through bodily symptoms.

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